A Lost World That Never Died

Early Medieval Urbanism in the Byzantine Islands of the Western Mediterranean

LUCA ZAVAGNO

Cities of (Byzantine) Islands

This paper focuses on two Mediterranean islands— Sicily and Sardinia—and the fate of their urban landscapes in the passage from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages. During the late sixth to the tenth century, the Mediterranean changed from having a unified political and economic Roman imperial structure into a more fragmented, though not necessarily more level, playing field between competing powers.[1] The period also witnessed the transformation of the late antique urban "carapax."[2] Often labeled in the historiography as simply a journey "from *polis* to *kastron*," the situation was more complex. There were differences among regions and subregions, and the transformation of the urban fabric "parallel[led] development of the human, social, economic and cultural fabric of the same cities."[3]

By examining the trajectories of insular spaces, light can be shed on the world of political and socio-economic resilience, as reflected in changes to their urban fabric, planning, and landscape. As I have shown elsewhere, Byzantine historiography has made a case for large islands as outliers of an empire centered on its Aegean–Anatolian hinterland.[4] Byzantine histori-

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1   D. Valérien, "The Medieval Mediterranean," in *A Companion to Mediterranean History*, ed. P. Horden and S. Kinoshita (London, 2014), 77–90, at 80–81; C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009), 76–111.

2   E. Zanini, "Coming to the End: Early Byzantine Cities after the Mid-6th Century," in *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Belgrade, 22–27 August 2016): Plenary Papers*, ed. S. Marjanović-Dušanić (Belgrade, 2016), 127–43, at 131.

3   Ibid. On the transition from *polis* to *kastron*, see mainly J. Crow, "Alexios Komnenos and Kastamon: Castles and Settlement in Middle Byzantine Paphlagonia," in *Alexios I Komnenos: Papers of the Second Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989*, ed. M. Mullet and D. Smith (Belfast, 1996), 23; J. Haldon, "The Idea of the Town in the Byzantine Empire," in *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late*

Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, ed. G. P. Brogiolo and B. Ward-Perkins, Transformation of the Roman World 4 (Leiden, 1999), 1–23, at 15–16. See also C. Foss, "Life in City and Country," in *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, ed. C. Mango (Oxford, 2002), 71–95, at 83; H. G. Saradi, "The City in Byzantine Hagiography," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 2, *Genres and Contexts*, ed. S. Efthymiades (London, 2014), 427–28; W. Brandes, "Byzantine Cities in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries—Different Sources, Different Histories?," in Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, *Idea and Ideal of the Town*, 25–57.

For a regionally nuanced perspective, see W. Müller-Wiener, "Von der Polis zum Kastron: Wandlungen der Stadt im Ägäische Raum von der Antike zum Mittelalter," *Gymnasium* 93 (1986): 435–74; E. Ivison, "Urban Renewal and Imperial Revival 730–1025," *ByzF* 26 (2000): 1–46; A. Dunn, "The Transition from *Polis* to *Kastron* in the Balkans (III–VII cc.): General and Regional Perspectives," *BMGS* 18 (1994): 61–80; M. Veikou, "Byzantine Histories, Settlement Stories: Kastra, 'Isles of Refuge,' and 'Unspecified Settlements' as In-Between or Third Spaces; Preliminary Remarks on Aspects of Byzantine Settlement in Greece (6th–10th c.)," in *Οι Βυζαντινές Πόλεις, 8ος–15ος αι.: Προοπτικές της έρευνας και νέες ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις*, ed. T. Kioussopoulou (Rethymno, 2012), 159–206.

4   L. Zavagno, "'Islands in the Stream': For a New History of the Large Islands of the Byzantine Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 33.2 (2018): 149–77. Chris Wickham (*Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* [Oxford, 2005],

ans and archaeologists have also argued that formerly prosperous islands like Sardinia and Cyprus became deserted and depopulated following the Muslim raids from the second half of the seventh century;[5] insular urban sites would have experienced a demographic downturn as people in cities and coastal territories moved inland and sheltered in smaller fortified settlements.[6] That interpretative framework appears to be in keeping with the "discontinuist" approach to the transformation of Byzantine cities, which argues for a total collapse of urban organization and social and economic life from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages.[7]

Indeed, it would be tempting to swing the interpretative pendulum the other way and build a case for continuous urban life in Byzantine cities, based on the economic vitality, political expediency, and strategic importance documented on large islands. Cosentino has described them convincingly as "economic space(s) relatively more developed than northern and central Italy, the Balkans or Asia Minor in the seventh and eighth century."[8] Nevertheless, such an interpretative

swing seems in line with the "continuists," who stress that cities did survive physically; while they may have become smaller, and inhabitants may have been confined to their citadels as a result of constant enemy harassment, the cities retained their roles as centers of commercial activity, small commodity production, and administration.[9]

In truth, however, the juxtaposition of continuity and discontinuity is unproductive to an analysis of the causes and effects of the transition of urban sites, because their social structures, planning, and fabric are too often predicated on particular regional or subregional trajectories.[10] A less stringent interpretative model was proposed by Whittow, who pointed to the negative effects of a compulsive search for a clear watershed between the Roman "golden age" of urbanism and the Byzantine era.[11] He tried to reconcile Horden and Purcell's idea of Mediterranean connectivity with those of Wickham, who proposed that city elites were key to molding the urban sociopolitical dynamics and economic functions, and Haldon, who stressed the reorganization of the Byzantine state along new fiscal, military, and religious lines.[12] Continuity and decline, therefore,

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32) has defined the Byzantine heartland as the "uneasy coupling of two wildly different geographical zones: the Anatolian plateau and the Aegean, one of them ecologically poor and devastated by political events [of the seventh century], the other in parallel systemic crisis."

5   Such an interpretation has been proposed recently for Sardinian urban settlements by P. G. Spanu, "Byzantine Sardinia," in *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, ed. S. Cosentino (Leiden, 2021), 496–521, at 513–15. On the timeline of the first Muslim raids in the central Mediterranean, see E. Jeffreys and J. Pryor, *The Age of the Δρομων: The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204*, The Medieval Mediterranean 62 (Leiden, 2006), 25–29.

6   E. Malamut, *Les îles de l'Empire byzantin: VIIIᵉ–XIIᵉ siècles* (Paris, 1988), 260–89. See L. Zavagno, "Brief Notes on the Byzantine Insular Urbanism in the Eastern Mediterranean between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (ca. 650–ca. 800 CE)," *Journal of Cyprus Studies* 21 (2020): 63–78.

7   A. P. Kazhdan, "Vizantiiskie Goroda v VII–XI vv.," in *Sovetskaya Arkheologiya* 21 (1954): 164–88. See also, e.g., J. Howard-Johnston, "Authority and Control in the Interior of Asia Minor, Seventh–Ninth Centuries," in *Authority and Control in the Countryside: From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (Sixth–Tenth Century)*, ed. A. Delattre, M. Legendre, and P. Sijpestejin (Leiden, 2019), 139–41; J. Haldon, "The End of Rome? The Transformation of the Eastern Empire in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries CE," in *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. J. P. Arnason and K. Raaflaub (Oxford, 2011), 199–228, at 202; R. Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions in Byzantium and Neighboring Lands* (Oxford, 2019), 345–47.

8   S. Cosentino, "'Mentality, Technology and Commerce': Shipping amongst Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity and Beyond," in

The Insular System of the Byzantine Mediterranean: Archaeology and History, ed. E. Zanini, P. Pergola, and D. Michaelidis (Oxford, 2013), 65–76, at 73.

9   G. Ostrogorsky, "Byzantine Cities in the early Middle Ages," *DOP* 13 (1959): 45–66. Also, F. Trombley, "Byzantine 'Dark Age' Cities in Comparative Context," in *Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis*, pt. 2, ed. M. Anastos (New York, 1993), 429–49. On the discontinuist vs. continuist debate, see F. Curta, "Postcards from Maurilia, or the Historiography of the Dark-Age Cities of Byzantium," *European Journal of Post-Classical Archaeologies* 6 (2016): 89–110, at 95–96 with further bibliography. See also N. Tsivikis, "Moving beyond the Invisible Cities of Byzantium," *European Journal of Post-Classical Archaeologies* 10 (2020): 325–35.

10   Curta, "Postcards," 105–6. See also M. Decker, *The Byzantine Dark Ages* (London, 2016), 81–88; P. Niewöhner, "Urbanism," in *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia from the End of Late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks*, ed. P. Niewöhner (Oxford, 2016), 39–59; R. Cormack, "Byzantine Aphrodisias Changing the Symbolic Map of a City," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, n.s. 36 (216) (1990): 26–41.

11   M. Whittow, "When Did the Ancient World End in the Büyük Menderes? New Long-Term Narratives for Regional History," in *Mentesegullati Tarihi 25–27 Nisan 2012—Mugla Bildiriler*, ed. A. Çevik and M. Keçis (Istanbul, 2013), 35–53.

12   Wickham, *Framing*, 596–609; J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1990); idem, "The Idea of Town in the Byzantine Empire," in Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, *Idea and Ideal of Town*, 1–23; idem, *The Empire That*

leave the scene as intensification and abatement metaphorically enter the conceptual building of early medieval urban development.[13] As Whittow stated:

> Intensification comes when a surplus can be exchanged for other goods. Exchange depends on connectivity (the greater it was, the higher the incentive to increase the output); the reverse is abatement: a shift towards lower production and smaller surpluses, limiting the resources in the hands of the rich but not necessarily harming the quality of life of the population at large.[14]

On the one hand, it is revealing that two of the best excavated Byzantine urban sites—the first on the Anatolian plateau (Amorium) and the second on an island (Gortyn in Crete)—both show an abundance of urban life beyond the seventh-to-eighth-century ring of walls; this unfolded throughout "islands" of sociopolitical patronage, elite and subelite residence, and artisanal and commercial activities that characterized city life.[15] On the other hand, the Byzantine cities relied both on the centrality of representational spaces in terms of urban fabric (exemplified in the persistence of colonnaded streets as ceremonial and processional backdrops) and sociopolitical ideology.[16] If we consider only insular

urban sites, continued maintenance and even reconstruction of principal urban thoroughfares have been shown both in Sicily (both in the capital city of Syracuse and in Palermo) and Cyprus (in Salamis-Constantia).[17]

Was this the case in all islands, though? To answer this question, I will apply a different theoretical model to conceptualize the transformations experienced by insular urban environments in functional and structural terms. This model has been described as "city of islands." I advocate for its use not only because of the geographical location of the study environments, but also because I believe the topography of most of the cities presented in the paper developed along with multiple foci of settlement and socioeconomic activity revolving around built centers of political, military, or religious power. A diversified constellation of centers of population, activities, and functions was therefore not always limited to or contained within imposing walled enceintes. They could go beyond them, as the latter might have acted as convenient temporary shelters for the urban and rural population and/or residences for the local and imperial military, ecclesiastical, and administrative authorities, as well as local elites.[18]

Clearly, mine is not an attempt to impose a one-size-fits-all model on the sociopolitical, economic, and urban transformations experienced by Byzantine cities, but the model shouldn't be regarded as applying only to islands.[19] Nevertheless, the "city of islands" model presents a useful analytical tool to sketch the image of

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Would Not Die: The Paradox of Eastern Roman Survival, 640–740 (Cambridge, 2016), 248–90.

13 Although the model of intensification-abatement was not originally applied to urban sites (P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* [Oxford, 2000], 260–79), it has been used effectively to interpret their transformation in sociopolitical, economic, and cultural terms: see, e.g., G. Avni, "From Polis to Madina Revisited: Urban Change in Byzantine and Early Islamic Palestine," *JRAS* 3 (2011): 328–29.

14 Whittow, "When Did the Ancient World End," 52–53.

15 On Amorium, see mainly E. Ivison, "Amorium in the Byzantine Dark Ages (Seventh to Ninth Centuries)," in *Post-Roman Towns, Trade, and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, vol. 2, *Byzantium, Pliska, and the Balkans*, ed. J. Henning (Berlin, 2007), 25–60; C. Lightfoot, "Business as Usual? Archaeological Evidence for Byzantine Commercial Enterprise at Amorium in the Seventh to Eleventh Centuries," in *Trade and Markets in Byzantium*, ed. C. Morrisson (Washington, DC, 2012), 177–92; Decker, *Byzantine Dark Ages*, 108–13. On Salamis–Constantia, see L. Zavagno, "'A Wonderful City of Palms and Dates': Salamis–Constantia in Transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages (ca. 600–ca. 800)," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 29.2 (2014): 111–38.

16 H. W. Day, *The Afterlife of the Roman City: Architecture and Ceremony in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge,

2015), 127–220. In this light, and even when it comes to the long-debated problem of encroachment, one "should not exaggerate the piecemeal nature of appropriation of public space and buildings for it is clear that we are looking here, not at piecemeal and chaotic appropriation, but at a largescale 'development'"; B. Ward-Perkins, "Re-using the Architectural Legacy of the Past, entre idéologie et pragmatisme," in Brogiolo and Ward-Perkins, *Idea and Ideal of Town*, 225–59, at 243.

17 Day, *Afterlife of the Roman City*, 159–85. On the survival of the Roman street grid in many Byzantine cities in Gortyn, see also Curta, "Postcards," 96.

18 My starting points in devising the "city of islands" model came from G. P. Brogiolo, "A proposito dell'organizzazione urbana nell'alto medioevo," *Archeologia Medievale* 14 (1987): 27–45. See also Wickham, *Framing*, 676–78; J. Crow, "Archaeology," in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. L. James (Oxford, 2010), 297–98; S. Loseby, "Mediterranean City," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Rousseau (Oxford, 2009), 139–55, at 152.

19 See L. Zavagno, "The Unbearable Transience of the City: Urban Spaces in the Byzantine World in the Transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages (ca. 550–ca. 800 A.D.)," in *Transforming Sacred Spaces: New Approaches to Byzantine Ecclesiastical Architecture*

insular urban sites. It defines an urban image and plan where the economic function, supported mainly by the wealth of local elites, dictated the tempo of sociopolitical city life and reformulated its spatial structure, built environment, and urban fabric.[20]

A range of recent studies has made it clear that the story of insular urbanism in the period between the late sixth and the tenth century is one of resilience, not evanescence; of connectivity, not, or at least not exclusively, isolation;[21] of inclusion in an empire that would not die, not political desertion on the part of Constantinople;[22] of archaeology documenting a selective but continuous occupation and economic vitality of coastal sites like Gortyn in Crete, Salamis-Constantia in Cyprus, Olbia and Cagliari in Sardinia, and eventually Syracuse, Catania, and Palermo in Sicily;[23] of new models of urbanism, as in Enna in Sicily, Kastro Apalirou in Naxos, or Oxa in Crete, where pride of place is given to security, fortifications, and strategic control of the hinterland; and of new adaptive strategies in settlement patterns, for example, in Cyprus, where a capital "went missing" in the late eighth century.[24]

There is no space here to survey all the aforementioned sites. The size and geomorphology of islands, as well as strategic locations across the Mediterranean shipping routes and currents, all matter greatly.[25] Braudel famously defined islands like Crete and Sicily as micro-continents that should not be compared with the "pulverized" Aegean islets or the Maltese and Balearic archipelagos.[26] As a result, the selection of islands, and therefore urban sites, proposed in this article will be limited to those in the Tyrrhenian Sea (fig. 1).

The reason for this choice is threefold. The first is based on the availability of literary and material sources. Indeed, the Tyrrhenian Sea in the period under scrutiny can be regarded as a "trilateration," measured from three sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and administrative foci: Rome (with Naples, Amalfi, Salerno, and Gaeta as southern urban "outposts"), Sicily (with Malta guarding its southern flank), and Sardinia.[27] I will leave the

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from the Transitional Period, ed. S. Feist (Wiesbaden, 2020), 17–38, at 31.

20   Wickham, Framing, 594–95.

21   Horden and Purcell, Corrupting Sea, 74–77, 133–37. See also M. Veikou, "One Island, Three Capitals: Insularity and the Successive Relocations of the Capital of Cyprus from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages," in Medieval Cyprus: A Place of Cultural Encounters, ed. S. Rogge and M. Grünbart (Münster, 2015), 453–63; J. M. Gordon and A. Kouremenos, "Introduction: Mediterranean Archaeologies of Insularity in the Age of Globalization," in Mediterranean Archaeologies of Insularity in the Age of Globalization, ed. eadem (Oxford, 2020), 1–10, at 1–2.

22   Zanini, Pergola, and Michaelides, Insular System of Byzantine Mediterranean. It is not by chance that together with Amorium, Corinth, and Butrint the best example of Byzantine urban archaeology is offered by Gortyn, the Byzantine capital of the island of Crete. See E. Zanini, "Macro-economy, Micro-ecology, and the Fate of Urbanized Landscape in Late Antique and Early Byzantine Crete," in Change and Resilience: The Occupation of Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity, ed. M. Cau Ontiveros and C. Mas Florit (Providence, 2019), 139–61 with further bibliography.

23   I will return to most of these sites in the last section of this paper. For Salamis–Constantia, see Zavagno, "'A Wonderful City of Palms and Dates,'" 111–38.

24   On Kastro Apalirou, see D. Hill, K. Ødegård, and H. Roland, "Kastro Apalirou, Naxos: A 7th Century Urban Foundation," in New Cities in Late Antiquity, ed. E. Ryzos (Turnhout, 2017), 281–92; S. Turner and J. Crow, "The Christianization of Island Landscapes in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: New Perspectives from

Naxos in the Aegean," in Cau Ontiveros and Mas Florit, Change and Resilience, 217–34, at 226–29. As for Oxa, Dr. Konstantinos Roussos is currently investigating the site and the publication is in progress. I had the good fortune of attending his presentation of the preliminary report as delivered at the Third International Conference on Byzantine and Medieval Studies, 17–19 January 2020, in Nicosia, Cyprus. On Oxa, see also A. Geisler, "Fortification System of the Byzantine Site of Oxa (Crete)" (MA thesis, Masaryk University, 2015). On Naxos, see also J. Crow and D. Hill, Naxos and the Byzantine Aegean: Insular Responses to Regional Change (Athens, 2018); A. Vionis, "Reading Art and Material Culture: Greeks, Slavs, and Arabs in the Byzantine Aegean," in Negotiating Co-Existence: Communities, Cultures, and Convivencia in Byzantine Society, ed. B. Crostini and S. La Porta (Trier, 2013), 103–27.

On the concept of Cyprus as an island where a single capital went missing from the second half of the eighth century, see N. Bakirtzis and L. Zavagno, "Beyond Capitals: Urbanism in Cyprus between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (ca. 600–ca. 1100 CE.)," in The 8th Century: Patterns of Transition in Economy and Trade throughout the Late Antique, Early Medieval, and Islamicate Mediterranean in Multidisciplinary Perspectives, ed. S. Esders, F. Krueger, S. Polla, T. Richter, and C. Wickham (forthcoming 2022).

25   M. Veikou, "Mediterranean Byzantine Ports and Harbors in the Complex Interplay between Environment and Society: Spatial, Socio-Economic, and Cultural Considerations Based on Archeological Evidence from Greece, Cyprus, and Asia Minor," in Harbours and Maritime Networks as Complex Adaptive Systems, ed. J. Preiser-Kapeller and F. Daim (Mainz, 2015), 39–61, at 41–48.

26   F. Braudel, The Mediterranean and Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, 2 vols. (1966; Los Angeles, 1996), 1:148–49. For the concept of "pulverized" insular spaces in the Eastern Mediterranean see Malamut, Les îles (n. 6, above), 32.

27   For a definition of trilateration as means of controlling and measuring geographical extension (as opposed to triangulation, which

Fig. 1. Map of the Tyrrhenian Sea with the main centers mentioned in the paper. Map by author; underlying image courtesy of Eric Gaba / Wikimedia Commons.

is often hindered by the line of sight), see B. Sturgess and F. Carey, "Trilateration," in *The Surveying Handbook*, ed. R. Brinker (New York, 1987), 340–89. On Malta and its religious, economic, and military links with Sicily, see B. Bruno and N. Cutajar, "Malta between the Ninth and the Tenth Century—Two Early Medieval Contexts," *Archeologia Medievale* 45 (2018): 111–22; B. Bruno and N. Cutajar,

first aside, if only because of its complexity in terms of size, wealth, and governmental infrastructures, but in addition, the role of ecclesiastical and secular

"Byzantine Malta," in Cosentino, *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, 522–39, at 525–27.

aristocratic power in the transformation of the urban fabric there has been examined exhaustively by Wickham (Rome), Arthur (Naples), and Schwartz and Skinner (Amalfi).[28] Of the other two islands, Sicily presents us with a score of local hagiographical sources and the best published archaeology.[29] It is important to note that this drastic improvement in the study and availability of Sicilian material culture (in particular, seals, coins, and ceramics), stratigraphically excavated urban sites, and rural surveys has only happened in the past twenty years. This has nonetheless led scholars to produce an all-encompassing picture of the changes in Sicilian settlement patterns as well as developments of the local economy (in terms of production, distribution, and consumption), bureaucratic machinery, structures of local and imperial governance, and military authority in the period under examination here.[30]

As for Sardinia, recent urban excavations, coupled with a careful examination of primary sources, have allowed scholars like Martorelli, Spanu, Muresu, and Cosentino, to name just a few, to shed light on the urban trajectories of the local capital (Cagliari) while reassessing its role as the only catalyst of Sardinian medieval urbanism.[31] As will be seen, urban life in

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28 C. Wickham, *Medieval Rome: Stability and Crisis of a City, 900–1150* (Oxford, 2019); P. Arthur, *Naples from Roman Town to City-State*, Archaeological Monographs of the British School at Rome 12 (Cambridge, 2002); U. Schwarz, *Amalfi im frühen Mittelalter, 9.–11. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Amalfitaner Überlieferung* (Tübingen, 1978); P. Skinner, *Medieval Amalfi and Its Diaspora, 800–1250* (Cambridge, 2017). On the urban history of Amalfi, see also H. Jinnai, "Relazione tra la struttura urbana e la tipologia abitativa di Amalfi," in *Città di mare del Mediterraneo medievale: Tipologie; Atti del convegno di studi in memoria di Robert P. Bergman (Amalfi, 1–3 giugno 2001)*, Atti del Centro di Cultura e Storia Amalfitana 9 (Amalfi, 2005), 335–62. Here one should however consider—as Wickham asserts—that "the history of southern Italian principalities (itself lacking a good monographic synthesis) has seldom recognized the strong similarities that the Roman region had with Benevento, Naples, Capua or Salerno"; Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, 3.

29 On Sicilian hagiography, see M. Re, "Italo-Greek Hagiography," in *The Ashgate Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 1, ed. S. Efthymiades (Aldershot, 2011), 231–59. On Sicilian archaeology, see, e.g., E. Kislinger, "Archeologia e storia: Ricostruire insieme la Sicilia bizantina," in *Byzantino-Sicula 4: Atti del I Congresso internazionale di archeologia della Sicilia bizantina*, ed. R. M. Carra Bonacasa (Palermo, 2002), 89–104; L. Arcifa and L. Maniscalco, *Dopo l'antico: Ricerche di archeologia medievale* (Palermo, 2017); S. Valpreda, *Sikelia 2: La Sicilia dei Bizantini; I Bizantini di Sicilia* (Castelvetrano, 2020); L. Arcifa and M. Sgarlata, eds., *From Polis to Madina: La trasformazione delle città siciliane tra tardoantico e alto medioevo* (Bari, 2020).

30 Some works that pulled Sicily out of the sort of archaeological black hole still engulfing it in the early 1990s are represented by the works of Vivien Prigent (on seals), Cecile Morrisson and Giuseppe Guzzetta (on coins), and Giuseppe Cacciaguerra and Maria Serena Rizzo (on ceramics), as well as Lucia Arcifa (urban archaeology) and Angelo Castrorao Barba, Alessandra Molinari, and Emanuele Vaccaro (rural settlement patterns). See L. Arcifa, "Indicatori archeologici per l'alto medioevo nella Sicilia Orientale," in *Piazza Armerina: Villa*

del Casale; Scavi e studi nel decennio 2004–2014, ed. P. Pensabene (Roma, 2019), 105–28, G. Cacciaguerra, "La ceramica a vetrina pesante altomedievale in Sicilia: Nuovi dati e prospettive di ricerca," *Archeologia Medievale* 36 (2009): 285–300; idem, "Dinamiche insediative, cultura materiale e scambi in Sicilia tra tardoantico e altomedioevo: Il caso di Santa Caterina (Melilli, SR)," *Archeologia Medievale* 35 (2008): 427–51; A. Castrorao Barba, *La fine delle ville romane in Italia tra tarda antichità e alto medioevo (III–VIII)* (Bari, 2020), 254–62; G. Guzzetta, "Moneta locale e moneta metropolitana nella Sicilia bizantina," in *Bisanzio e le periferie dell'impero: Atti del convegno internazionale nell'ambito delle celebrazioni del millenario della fondazione dell'Abbazia di San Nilo a Grottaferrata (Catania, 26–28 novembre 2007)*, ed. R. Gentile Messina (Acireale, 2011), 125–45; A. Molinari, "La Sicilia e lo spazio mediterraneo dai bizantini all'islam," *Territorio, Sociedad y Poder* 2 (2009): 123–42; idem, "Sicily between the 5th and the 10th Century: Villae, Villages, Towns, and Beyond; Stability, Expansion, or Recession?," in Zanini, Pergola, and Michaelidis, *Insular System of Byzantine Mediterranean* (n. 8, above), 97–114; C. Morrisson, "La Sicile byzantine: Un lueur dans les siècles obscurs," *Numismatica e antichità classiche, quaderni ticinesi* 27 (1998): 307–34; L. Arcifa, V. Prigent, and A. Nef, "Sicily in a Mediterranean Context: Imperiality, Mediterranean Polycentrism and Internal Diversity (6th–10th century)," *MÉFRM* 133-32 (2021): 339–74; V. Prigent, "La Sicile byzantine entre papes et empereurs (6ème–8ème siècle)," in *Zwischen Ideal und Wirklichkeit: Herrschaft auf Sizilien von der Antike bis zum Spätmittelalter*, ed. D. Engels, L. Geis, and M. Kleu (Stuttgart, 2010), 201–30; M. S. Rizzo, "Anfore di tipo siciliano dal territorio di Agrigento," in *LRCW: Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares, and Amphorae in the Mediterranean: Archaeology and Archaeometry*, vol. 1, *The Mediterranean: A Market without Frontiers*, ed. N. Poulou-Papadimitriou (Oxford, 2014), 213–24; E. Vaccaro, "Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries AD: A Case of Persisting Economic Complexity?," *Al-Masāq* 25.1 (2013): 34–69.

31 P. G. Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina fra VI e VII secolo* (Oristano, 1998); S. Cosentino, "Byzantine Sardinia between West and East: Features of a Regional Culture," *Millennium* 1 (2004): 328–67; idem, "La Sardegna bizantina: Temi di storia economica e sociale," in *Ai confini dell'impero: Storia, arte e archeologia della Sardegna bizantina*, ed. P. Corrias and S. Cosentino (Cagliari, 2002), 55–68; R. Martorelli, "Archeologia urbana a Cagliari: Un bilancio di trent'anni di ricerche sull'età tardoantica e altomedievale," *Studi Sardi* 34 (2009): 213–37; idem, "Cagliari bizantina: Alcune riflessioni dai nuovi dati dell'archeologia," *European Journal of Postclassical Archaeologies* 5 (2015): 175–200. See also M. Milanese, "Contribution of Archaeology to Medieval and Modern Sardinia," in *A Companion to Sardinian History, 500–1500*, ed. M. Hobart (Leiden, 2017), 271–313; M. Muresu, *La moneta "indicatore" dell'assetto insediativo della Sardegna bizantina* (Perugia,

Sardinia showed previously unsuspected resilience on both the eastern (Olbia) and western coasts (Aristhianis and Turris Libisonis).[32] Moreover, urban life in early medieval Sardinia seems to be based on a loose but continuous sociopolitical, administrative, and military dependence on Byzantium, although paired with local and expedient interactions and strong economic links with the "others" (the Muslims, the Lombards, the Carolingians, and papal Rome).[33]

This last assertion harmonizes with my second motive for focusing on the Tyrrhenian Sea, which stems from the peculiar administrative, fiscal, political, and military structures of Byzantine governance as adopted in Sicily and Sardinia following the fall of Byzantine North Africa to the Arabs in the last decade of the seventh century.[34] In Sicily, the creation of a theme with Syracuse as its capital testifies to the uninterrupted integration of the local urban-oriented elites in the Constantinopolitan imperial machinery.[35] It is important to note that the origins of the process of

(re-)integration of Sicily into the imperial structures of power harkened back to the early sixth century.[36] Indeed, Justinian, in one of his *Novellae* (dated to 537), provided the island with ad hoc administrative and fiscal institutions as separated from the *Praefectura Praetorio Italiae*.[37] Archaeological surveys and literary sources (e.g., the *Registrum* of Gregory the Great) witness a territorial organization based upon interconnected productive and distributive semiurban and rural centers. These were linked to the major coastal harbors, a network administered and managed by wealthy ecclesiastical (both the Church of Ravenna and Rome had large estates on the island) and secular landowners (as well as imperial houses), as the role of granary of Constantinople was later foisted upon the island (from the seventh century onward).[38]

By contrast, Sardinia was one of the seven provinces of the African pretorian prefecture following the Justinian *Reconquista* and later part of the African exarchate until its collapse in the last decade of the seventh century. Indeed, the island seems to have developed a rather more flexible and elastic system of governance that lasted well into the ninth century and maybe later.[39] However, occupation of such roles

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2018); R. Martorelli, *Know the Sea to Live the Sea: Conoscere il mare per vivere il mare Atti del Convegno (Cagliari–Cittadella dei Musei, Aula Coroneo, 7–9 marzo 2019)* (Perugia, 2019).

32   P. G. Spanu, "Dalla Sardegna bizantina alla Sardegna giudiŞ cale," in *Orientis radiata fulgore: La Sardegna nel contesto storico e culturale bizantino. Atti del Convegno di Studi (Cagliari 30 Novembre–1 Dicembre 2007)*, ed. L. Casula, A. Corda, and A. Piras (Cagliari, 2008), 356–67.

33   See R. Rowland, Jr., *The Periphery in the Center: Sardinia in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Oxford, 2001), with a good overview of the traditional historiography that includes scholars like Besta (E. Besta, *La Sardegna medioevale*, 2 vols. [Cagliari, 1908–9]), Solmi (F. Solmi, *Studi storici sulle istituzioni della Sardegna nel medio evo* [Cagliari, 1917]), and Boscolo (A. Boscolo, *La Sardegna bizantina e alto-giudicale* [Cagliari, 1978]).

34   C. Picard and M. Balard, *La Méditerranée au Moyen Âge: Les hommes et la mer* (Paris, 2014), 16; S. Cosentino, "La Sicilia, l'impero e il Mediterraneo (VII–IX secolo): Centralità politica, mobilità geografica e trasformazioni sociali," in *Byzantino-Sicula 7: Ritrovare Bisanzio; Atti delle giornate di studio sulla civiltà bizantina in Italia meridionale e nei Balcani dedicate alla memoria di André Guillou (Palermo 26–28 maggio 2016)*, ed. M. Re, C. Rognoni, and F. P. Vuturo (Palermo, 2019), 71–90, at 71.

35   On the creation of the Sicilian theme, see mainly S. Cosentino, *Storia dell'Italia bizantina (VI–XI secolo): Da Giustiniano ai Normanni* (Bologna, 2008), 142–45; also E. Zanini, *Le Italie bizantine: Territorio, insediamenti ed economia nella provincia bizantina d'Italia* (Bari, 1999), 94–95; E. Ragia, "The Geography of the Provincial Administration of the Byzantine Empire (ca. 600–1200): 1.3. Apothekai of Africa and Sicily, Final Notes and Conclusions," *Ἑῷα καὶ ἑσπέρια* 8 (2008–12): 113–44, at 118–20.

36   Oikonomides (and later Brown) dates the creation of the Sicilian theme to early 690s (between 692 and 698) based on a later Arab list of Byzantine themes (written by al-Djarmi) (N. Oikonomidès, "Une liste arabes des stratèges byzantins du VIIᵉ siècle et les origines di theme de Sicile," *RSBN* 1 [1964]: 121–30; T. S. Brown, "Byzantine Italy [680–876]," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard [Cambridge, 2008], 433–64, at 436). This date is confirmed by the appearance of the first lead seals mentioning a Sicilian *strategos* (see M. Nichanian and V. Prigent, "Les stratèges de Sicile: De la naissance du thème au règne de Léon V," *REB* 61 [2003]: 97–141, at 133–38) and the analysis of the volume and typology of coins issued in the early 690s (V. Prigent, "La circulation monétaire en Sicile [VIᵉ–VIIᵉ siècle]," in Zanini, Pergola, and Michaelidis, *Insular System of Byzantine Mediterranean*, 139–59, at 154).

37   Cosentino, *Storia*, 131–32.

38   Prigent, "La Sicile byzantine entre papes," 201–8; Cosentino, "La Sicilia, l'impero e il mediterraneo," 72–76. See also L. Arcifa, "Byzantine Sicily," in Cosentino, *A Companion to Byzantine Italy* (n. 5, above), 472–95, at 474–78; Haldon, *Empire That Would Not Die* (n. 11, above), 212. On the role of Sicily in the grain supply of Constantinople, see mainly V. Prigent, "Le rôle des provinces d'Occident dans l'approvisionnement de Constantinople (618–717): Témoignages numismatiques et sigillographiques," *MÉFRM* 118.2 (2006): 269–99.

39   Muresu, *La moneta*, 305–6; Cosentino, *Storia*, 130–31; W. Kaegi, "Society and Institutions in Byzantine Africa," in Corrias and Cosentino, *Ai confini dell'impero*, 55–68.

by Sardinian dukes, *iudex*, and *archontes* in the period between the eighth and the tenth centuries stemmed less from the centrifugal inclinations of local secular and religious elites than from the ability of the so-called insular peripheries to produce fluid, creative, and expedient sociopolitical arrangements when faced with certain military or political challenges.[40]

As similar arrangements are documented in other insular outposts of the Byzantine Empire (in particular the Balearics), we can assess their fluctuating degree of economic and political integration (over both space and time) in a wider Byzantine *koine*.[41] This encompassed liminal coastal spaces as well as insular and coastal urban, and urban-like, communities, while promoting economic interaction, social contact, and cultural interchange.[42] Moreover, this koine boasted material indicators (e.g., lead seals, coins, and globular amphorae) that suggest a common culture, although the timeframe and volume of their presence and evolution vary greatly between the areas under consideration here.[43] In other words, we are confronted by a coastal society united through a long-standing framework of resilient urban centers.[44] The Tyrrhenian Sea, together

with the upper Adriatic, may be the best example of this, as it was dotted with urban insular (Cagliari, Olbia, Palermo, Syracuse, Catania, Taormina), quasi-insular (Amalfi), and coastal (Gaeta, Naples) gateway communities.[45] These acted less as peripheral shadows of a distant imperial center and more as significant players in the fragmented but still coherent Mediterranean interregional exchange, while at the same time remaining part of a Byzantine coastal trade system.[46]

Third, I hope that by focusing on the Tyrrhenian system of exchange and its urban catalysts for interregional and local economic interaction, as well as political aggregation to a Byzantine political and cultural koine, I can show that Constantinople retained a continuous and active interest in the western Mediterranean, even in more distant territories like the Balearics until they finally fell to the Umayyads in the early tenth century.[47] The resilience of Tyrrhenian urbanism in areas where gateway communities—still important bases for the Byzantine navy—were paired with newly built, carefully planned, and imperially sponsored fortified inland centers (e.g., Ragusa, Butera, or Enna in Sicily) enhanced Byzantine political, military, and diplomatic power well into the tenth century.[48]

40   L. Zavagno, "'Going to the Extremes': The Balearics and Cyprus in the Early Medieval Byzantine Insular System," *Al-Masāq* 31.2 (2019): 155–57. On the *archontes*, see also H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer: La marine de guerre; La politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VIIᵉ–XVᵉ s.* (Paris, 1966), 48; R. J. Lilie, "Zypern zwischen Byzantinern und Arabern (7.–10. Jahrhundert)," in *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Zyperns von der Spätantike bis zur Neuzeit: Symposium, München 12.–13. Juli 2002*, ed. J. G. Deckers, M. E. Mitsou, and S. Rogge (Münster, 2005), 82–89; S. Cosentino, "A Longer Antiquity? Cyprus, Insularity, and the Economic Transition," in *The Archaeology of Late Antique and Byzantine Cyprus (4th–12th centuries AD): Conference in Honour of Athanasios Papageorghiou*, ed. M. Parani and D Michaelides, Cahiers du Centre d'Études Chypriotes 43 (Paris, 2013), 93–102, at 93. On the development of Sardinian local authorities, see Spanu, "Dalla Sardegna bizantina," 370; Muresu, *La moneta*, 339–45.

41   P. Delogu, "Questioni di mare e costa," in *Da un mare all'altro: Luoghi di scambio nell'Alto Medioevo europeo e mediterraneo; Atti del Seminario Internazionale Comacchio, 27–29 marzo 2009*, ed. S. Gelichi and R. Hodges (Turnhout, 2012), 459–66, at 463.

42   J. Shepard, "Bunkers, Open Cities, and Boats in Byzantine Diplomacy," in *Byzantium, Its Neighbours and Its Cultures*, ed. D. Dzino and K. Perry (Leiden, 2017), 19–28.

43   P. Arthur, "From Italy to the Aegean and Back: Notes on the Archaeology of Byzantine Maritime Trade," in Gelichi and Hodges, *Da un mare all'altro*, 337–52, at 339–40.

44   C. Wickham, "Comacchio and the Central Mediterranean," in Gelichi and Hodges, *Da un mare all'altro*, 503–11, at 504.

45   I am using the concept of gateway communities as defined by Hodges with regard to the northern Emporia and later adopted by Horden and Purcell to describe Mediterranean coastal enclaves in a flux of connectivity. Gateway communities are settlements (not necessarily urban) through which "people and goods are funneled" (R. Hodges, *Peasants and Peasant Markets* [Oxford, 1988], 42–52; Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* [n. 13, above], 133). Purcell further elaborates on this definition when he states that a gateway community is "an entrepôt in a new sense, represented by certain cities of the hinge, drawing their character from their position at the interface between different *systems*"; N. Purcell, "On the Significance of East and West in Today's 'Hellenistic' History: Reflections on Symmetrical Worlds, Reflecting through World Symmetries," in *The Hellenistic West: Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. J. W. Prag and J. Crawley Quinn (Cambridge, 2013), 367–90, at 381. With regard to insular gateway communities, see also Veikou, "Mediterranean Byzantine Ports," 51; K. Kopaka, "What Is an Island? Concepts, Meanings, and Polysemies of Insular Topoi in Greek Sources," *European Journal of Archaeology* 11.2–3 (2009): 179–97, at 190–91.

46   J. Shepard, "Introduction: Circles Overlapping in the Upper Adriatic," in *Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic: Byzantium, the Carolingians, and the Treaty of Aachen (812)*, ed. M. Ančić, J. Shepard, and T. Vedriš (New York, 2018), 1–22.

47   Wickham, "Comacchio," 508–9.

48   F. Maurici, "Le città nella Sicilia bizantina: Un problema aperto," in *La Sicilia bizantina: Storia, città e territorio*, ed. M. Congiu, S. Modeo, and M. Arnone (Palermo, 2010), 115–46; L. Arcifa, "Trasformazioni

With these three premises in mind, we can finally set sail from this introduction. From here, I will address the issue of insular Tyrrhenian urbanism against the backdrop of the historiographical debate over insular spaces in the Byzantine Mediterranean during the transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages. I will examine the transformation of some Sicilian and Sardinian urban sites in terms of sociopolitical and economic functions as reflected by their changing fabric, landscape, and planning. Connectivity or isolation alone cannot fully explain the coherence of insular urban settlement patterns and landscapes, which resulted from their demographic persistence, economic vitality, and sociopolitical expedience. These are also the by-products of "islandness," described as "the sum of representations and experiences of islanders," which structured the urban territory and spatial experience of its people; it embodied their flexibility in adapting to constant changes in power, trade networks, and cultural interactions.[49]

Urbanism in the Tyrrhenian Sea: From Sicily to Sardinia

In this section, I focus on the "city of islands" as a model for the urban insular settlement pattern in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Here I will sketch a picture of insular urban life that presents it as more than an irreversible process of retrenchment, fortification, ruralization, and/or abandonment of the coasts in the face of repeated Muslim raids.[50] A careful analysis of distributive patterns of local and imported pottery, along with sigillographic and numismatic evidence, neutralizes what Day describes as "the perils of pronouncing the demise of urbanism in the absence of good archaeology, [while adding to] starting points to rethink other interpretative paradigms to post-Classical urbanism."[51]

Indeed, for Sicily as well as Sardinia, the drastic improvement in stratigraphically controlled urban excavation and a better analytical grasp of the material fossil

guides for the transitional period tell us that local ecclesiastical and secular elites remained prevailingly urban-oriented and exhibited a resilient, though flexible, degree of loyalty to Constantinople (more pronounced in Sicily than in Sardinia).[52] They also tell us of urban sites fully integrated into a system of exchange—the Tyrrhenian one—as well as part of a Byzantine shipping network based on "politically important harbors as well as privileged informal ones like those characterizing coastal strips," as evidenced by globular amphorae.[53] They provide glimpses of urban economic life, as reflected by such harbors as Olbia in Sardinia and Palermo in Sicily. They tell us that the insular churches maintained a continuous political, administrative, and economic importance in local urban life, as demonstrated by the creation of new bishoprics (Cefalu, Tindari, and Alesa) along the northeastern coast of Sicily, which hint at a renewed strategic and military relevance of the island;[54] by the land possessions of the Ravennate and Roman Church; and by the centrality of the Caralitan archbishop and Syracusan metropolitan in the religious and secular local urban life, as reflected by sigillographic and hagiographic sources.[55] They tell us about the presence of the army and navy, which provided an economic stimulus that helped other Tyrrhenian urban centers, like Cagliari, Syracuse, and Catania, if only partially, to survive well into the ninth century and beyond. Eventually, they tell us that the western Mediterranean did not fade before Byzantine eyes, and they help fill an historiographical gap, for Sardinian and Sicilian cities are often overlooked when scholars analyze the so-called origins of medieval cities

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urbane nell'altomedioevo siciliano: Uno *status quaestionis*," in *Paesaggi urbani tardoantichi: Casi a confronto; Atti delle Giornate Gregoriane VIII Edizione (29–30 novembre 2014)*, ed. M. C. Parello and M. S. Rizzo (Bari, 2016), 31–40, at 36–37.

49   Veikou, "One Island, Three Capitals," 359.

50   Malamut, *Les îles*, 260–96.

51   Day, *Afterlife of the Roman City* (n. 16, above), 202.

52   Shepard, "Bunkers, Open Cities, and Boats"; also Arthur, "From Italy to the Aegean."

53   Quotation from Wickham, "Comacchio," 509. See also P. Arthur, "Byzantine 'Globular Amphorae' and the Early Middle Ages: Attempting to Shed Light on a Dark-Age Enigma," *Archeologia Medievale* 45 (2018): 281–89; A. Molinari, "Le anfore medievali come proxy per la storia degli scambi mediterranei tra VIII e XIII secolo?," *Archeologia Medievale* 45 (2018): 293–307.

54   Arcifa, "Byzantine Sicily," 477–78.

55   For Sicily, see R. Rizzo, "La Cristianizzazione della Sicilia attraverso il 'Registrum Epistolarum' di Gregorio Magno," in Carra Bonacasa, *Byzantino-Sicula 4* (n. 29, above), 119–46, at 143–46; Maurici, "Le città," 119–46, at 133–36. For Sardinia, see R. Turtas, "The Sardinian Church," in Hobart, *A Companion to Sardinian History*, 177–214, at 183–87; Muresu, *La moneta* (n. 31, above), 331–32.

in Italy.[56] Indeed, if Sicily remained central to the imperial fiscal and political structures, Sardinia, too often, has been considered as slowly drifting out of the area of Byzantine concern. On the contrary, I hope to show that Constantinople remained vigilant and interested in its affairs, as shown by the persistence of Byzantine structures of fiscal, military, and religious governance.[57]

There is space here to list only a few of the important moments in which Byzantium showed its continued interest in western Mediterranean political-military affairs. There is the famous expedition of Constans II in southern Italy and Sicily, where he met his fate in a Syracuse bathhouse in 668;[58] the naval victory of the Sardinian consul and *dux* against unnamed "barbarians" in the second quarter of the eighth century;[59] the role of Sicily in the confrontation between the Roman Church and the empire in Sicily and Calabria in 730s;[60] and numerous interventions of the Byzantine fleet in Tyrrhenian waters in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries.[61] In other words, Byzantium emerges as an

important political actor in the western Mediterranean, not a stranger in a peripheral political, military, and economic theater.[62]

As for the time frame of this study, it is important to remember that the balance of naval power between the Byzantines and the Arabs de facto changed between the first raid against Cyprus in 649, the so-called Battle of Masts in 655, and the first Arab siege of Constantinople at the beginning of the last quarter of the seventh century, for the last-named event clearly impacted upon the repression of the Sicilian revolt(s) after the assassination of Constans II.[63] This also meant that islands became contested and militarized spaces: Crete and Rhodes were occupied by the army of the

56   Sicily and Sardinia are indeed almost completely absent from two of the most important contributions to the history and origins of the medieval European city in the Italian peninsula. See G. P. Brogiolo, *Le origini della città medievale* (Mantua, 2011); N. Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne: An Archaeology of Italy, AD 300–800* (Aldershot, 2006).

57   T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy, A.D. 554–800* (Rome, 1984), 149–55. See also Cosentino, "'Mentality, Technology, and Commerce'" (n. 8, above), 67–74; idem, "A Longer Antiquity?," 97.

58   Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, trans. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), 490–91.

59   F. Fiori, *Costantino Hypatos e doux di Sardegna* (Bologna, 2001). See also Rowland, *Periphery*, 144; S. Cosentino, "Potere e istituzioni nella Sardegna bizantina," in Corrias and Cosentino, *Ai confini dell'impero* (n. 31, above), 1–13, at 7.

60   C. Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy and More: Studies in 'Dark Centuries' Byzantium," in *Millennium: Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.* 2 (Berlin, 2005), 79–136, at 100–103; M. McCormick, "Byzantium and the West, 700–900s," in *New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 2, *c. 700–c. 900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), 349–83; Prigent, "La Sicile byzantine entre papes."

61   M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 354–57; C. Zedda, "Bisanzio, l'Islam e i giudicati: La Sardegna e il mondo mediterraneo fra VII e XI secolo," *Archivio storico e giuridico sardo di Sassari* 10 (2006): 39–112, at 69–73; M. G. Stasolla, "La Sardegna nelle fonti arabe," in Corrias and Cosentino, *Ai confini dell'impero*, 79–92. See also J. Jarrett, "Nests of Pirates? 'Islandness' in the Balearic Islands and

La Garde-Freinet," *Al-Masāq* 31.2 (2019): 196–222; J. Signes Codoñer, "Bizancio y las islas Baleares en los siglos VIII y IX," in *Mallorca y Bizancio*, ed. R. Durán Tapia (Palma de Mallorca, 2005), 45–110.

62   M. McCormick, "Western Approaches," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge, 2008), 395–433. For Sardinia and Sicily, see, esp., W. Kaegi, "Byzantine Sardinia Threatened: Its Changing Situation in the Seventh Century," *Forme e caratteri della presenza bizantina nel Mediterraneo occidentale: La Sardegna (secoli VI–XI)*, ed. P. Corrias (Cagliari, 2012), 43–56; P. Fois, "Il ruolo della Sardegna nella conquista Islamica dell'occidente (VIII secolo)," *Rivista dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea* 7 (December 2011): 5–26; A. Nef and V. Prigent, "Per una nuova storia dell'alto medioevo siciliano," *Storica* 35–36 (2006): 1–55, at 36. See also Rowland, *Periphery*, 126–53; Cosentino, "La Sardegna" (n. 31, above); T. Lounghis, "Byzantine War Navy and the West: Fifth to Twelfth Centuries," in *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea*, ed. G. Theotokis and A. Yildiz (Turnhout, 2018), 21–43.

For Sardinia as a no-man's-land at the border with Islam, see Fois, "Il ruolo della Sardegna." An exception is represented by Corsica, as it was conquered by the Lombards in the first quarter of the seventh century: see D. Istria and P. Pergola, "La Corse byzantine (VIe–VIIe siècles)," in Zanini, Pergola, and Michaelidis, *Insular System of Byzantine Mediterranean* (n. 8, above), 77–86; G. Castiglia and P. Pergola, "Between Change and Resilience: Urban and Rural Settlement Patterns in Late Antique Corsica," in Cau Ontiveros and Mas Florit, *Change and Resilience* (n. 22, above), 25–49.

63   S. Cosentino, "Constans II and Its Navy," *BZ* 100.2 (2008): 577–603; Jeffreys and Pryor, *Age of the Δρομων* (n. 5, above), 25; T. Lounghis, *Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean: Safeguarding East Roman Identity (407–1204)* (Nicosia, 2010), 58–59. On the debated dating of the first Arab siege of Constantinople, see M. Jankowiak, "The First Arab Siege of Constantinople," in *Constructing the Seventh Century*, ed. C. Zuckerman, *TM* 17 (Paris, 2013), 237–320; for the Sicilian perspectives, see V. Prigent, "Des pères et des fils: Notes de numismatique sicilienne pour servir à l'histoire du règne de Constantin IV," in *Le saint, le moine et le paysan: Mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Michel Kaplan*, ed. O. Delouis, S. Métivier, and P. Pagès (Paris, 2016), 589–616; S. Cosentino, "Politics and Society," in Cosentino, *A Companion to Byzantine Italy* (n. 5, above), 29–67, at 40.

caliphs until the 680s, while Sicily and Sardinia were already being raided by the 670s.[64] Indeed, dominion over the ancient and medieval Mediterranean has always depended on the control of the maritime routes and the islands.[65] Abulafia and Carile have both stressed the importance of islands as nodal hubs in the Roman, and later Byzantine, "Thalassocracy,"[66] which the "big five" (Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, Crete, and Cyprus, according to Broodbank), as well as Malta, the Balearics, and the more scattered Aegean archipelagoes, continued to have from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages.[67] For instance, on the one hand, Cosentino has recently stressed how, until the late eighth century, "the Byzantine government clearly tried to exploit the agricultural resources of the Mediterranean islands [adding up to] an imperial corridor from Cyprus to the Balearics";[68] on the other hand, Nef has emphasized the military efforts on the part of the caliphate and the empire to control the Central Mediterranean (including southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, and Malta) as a largely maritime space, which was key to control of the Mediterranean between the mid-seventh and the ninth century.[69]

With this in mind, I will use the term "transition" to label the period under scrutiny here. I regard the term as the perfect way to characterize a time that was not one of neglect and decline but of change and evolution.[70] It also acts as a good complement to that of resilience, for it encourages us to move beyond a simple and reductive idea of crisis as we assess the ability of ecological, socioeconomic, and political systems not only to adapt to and overcome, but also actively shape, abrupt and unexpected changes.[71] Moreover, the use of the historiographical and analytical categories of transition and resilience allows us to discard the old and unfruitful opposition between continuity and decline when referring to the fate of cities between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.[72]

My overview of Tyrrhenian urbanism in transition begins in Sicily, as the island acted as a fiscal catalyst for the southern Italian territories (Calabria and Apulia) that remained in Byzantine hands.[73] This was mainly because of Sicily's importance in supplying Constantinople with grain after the disruption of the Egyptian tax-spine in the 640s and its elevation to the status of theme.[74] Sicily was the only large island of the Byzantine Empire to be ruled by a *strategos*, which speaks to its significance to the political, administrative, and bureaucratic imperial machinery, particularly after the fall of Ravenna to the Lombards in 751.[75] Its importance is well illustrated by the tale of the eighth-century Byzantine official Herakleides, who is said to have traveled to Constantinople from Sicily by entering one bath in Catania and exiting another in the capital.[76]

64   Valérien, "Medieval Mediterranean" (n. 1, above), 77. See also Arcifa, Prigent, and Nef, "Sicily in a Mediterranean Context" (n. 30 above), 342–44. On the militarization of Sicily and Sardinia, see Cosentino, "Politics and Society," 42–43. For a detailed chronology of the temporary occupation of some Mediterranean islands as part of the Arab "leapfrogging" strategy to reach Constantinople in the second half of the seventh century, see H. Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Philadelphia, 2008), 324–34. For Crete, esp., see C. Tzigonaki, "Crete: A Border at the Sea," in Cau Ontiveros and Mas Florit, *Change and Resilience*, 163–92, at 164–65; for Cyprus, see D. Metcalf, *Byzantine Cyprus, 491–1191 A.D.* (Nicosia, 2009).

65   C. Picard, *La mer des califes: Une histoire de la Méditerranée musulmane* (Paris, 2012), 235.

66   A. Carile, "La talassocrazia bizantina: VI–VIII sec.," in *Storia della marineria bizantina*, ed. idem and S. Cosentino (Bologna 2004), 7–32; D. Abulafia, "Islands in Context," in Cau Ontiveros and Mas Florit, *Change and Resilience*, 285–96, at 287.

67   C. Broodbank, *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World* (Oxford, 2013), 98.

68   S. Cosentino, "Insularity, Economy, and Social Landscape in the Early Byzantine Period," *RSBN* 55 (2019): 89–103, at 102.

69   A. Nef, "Byzantium and Islam in Southern Italy," in *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, 200–224, at 200.

70   K. Holum and H. Lapin, "Conceptualizing an Age of Transition," in *Shaping the Middle East: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in an Age of Transition, 400–800 A.D.*, ed. eadem (Bethesda, MD, 2011), 7; Veikou, "Byzantine Histories" (n. 3, above), 160–61.

71   M. Cau Ontiveros and C. Mas Florit, "Islands, Change, and Late Antiquity," in eadem, *Change and Resilience*, xxi–xxviii, at xxiv.

72   See L. Zavagno, *Cities in Transition: Urbanism in Byzantium between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2009), 1–30 with further bibliography.

73   Prigent, "Le rôle des provinces d'Occident" (n. 38, above); Cosentino, *Storia* (n. 35, above), 155–64; Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy and More," 85–102.

74   Wickham, *Framing* (n. 4, above), 789–94. On the creation of the Sicilian theme, see nn. 34–36, above.

75   V. Prigent, "Notes sur l'évolution de l'administration byzantine en Adriatique (VIIIᵉ–IXᵉ siècle)," *MÉFRM* 120.2 (2008): 393–417, at 397–400. See also Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, 4; Wickham, "Comacchio," 507; Cosentino, *Storia*, 26; Lounghis, *Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 11–12.

76   A. G. Alexakis, *The Greek Life of St. Leo Bishop of Catania (BHG 981b),* trans. S. Wessel (Brussels, 2011), 164–67; S. Davis-Secord,

The mental proximity between the island and the capital shown by this miraculous account pairs with the numerous travels McCormick documented between Sicily and Constantinople, which continued well after the Aghlabid invasion of the island in 829.[77]

Ease of communication between the capital and the island should come as no surprise, for Sicily, lying astride the trunk route linking the Tyrrhenian with the Aegean and southern Anatolia, acted as an economic interface between the eastern and western Mediterranean.[78] Sicily also worked as a convenient political and economic threshold, as shown by the facility and frequency of travels between the island and Muslim North Africa, as shown in documentary and hagiographic sources.[79] These obviously included military raids, like those causing trouble to Gregory of Dekapolis in the early ninth century, or the enslavement of Elias the Younger from Enna in the late ninth century.[80] Nevertheless, it also entailed diplomatic exchange and commercial relations with the "enemy."[81]

Indeed, for Sicily we have well-studied and published ceramics (e.g., glazed wares, *ceramica a stuoia* [matting wares], and globular amphorae), which point to a double network of connectivity, as the northwestern coast was oriented toward the Tyrrhenian and its main harbors/cities (Cagliari, Naples, Gaeta, Amalfi, and Rome), whereas the eastern coast looked toward the southern Adriatic and the Peloponnese.[82] A refinement of this model has also led scholars to conclude that the cities on the eastern Sicilian coast were directly connected with the southern Adriatic and centers like Otranto and Butrint.[83] Moreover, a recent analysis of the ceramic evidence, in particular globular amphorae from Malta, highlights the role of local urban centers and their harbors (e.g., Melita or the citadel of Gozo) as recipients of regular imports from eastern Sicily well into the ninth century.[84]

Numismatic evidence confirms the economic vitality of Sicily.[85] The mints of Catania, which were active until 629, and later Syracuse were the only ones issuing gold and bronze coins together with Constantinople, as its output found its way across the Mediterranean, Balkan, Central European, and Scandinavian trade routes.[86] Indeed, Sicilian coinage enjoyed a high level of continuity even in the Aegean

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Where Three Worlds Met: Sicily in the Early Medieval Mediterranean (Ithaca, 2017), 56–58. On the Life of Saint Leo, see S. Efthymiades, "Greek Byzantine Hagiography in Verse," in *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2:161–81, at 168–69.

77   McCormick, *Origins*, 502–8 with further bibliography. On the Aghlabid invasion and century-long conquest of Sicily, see A. Nef, "Reinterpreting the Aghlabid Sicilian Policy (827–910)," in *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors: Art and Material Culture in Ninth-Century North Africa*, ed. G. D. Anderson, C. Fenwick, M. Rosser-Owen, and S. Lamine (Leiden, 2017), 76–87; A. Nef, "Les armées arabo-musulmanes en Sicilie et en Italie du Sud (IXᵉ–Xᵉ siècles): Composition des troupes et silences des sources," in *Guerre et société au Moyen Âge: Byzance–Occident (VIIIᵉ – XIIIᵉ siècle)*, ed. D. Barthélemy and J.-C. Cheynet (Paris, 2010), 85–100.

78   McCormick, *Origins*, 593.

79   Purcell, "On the Significance of East and West," 374. For a good overview of the travels across the "Central Mediterranean frontier," see Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met*, 72–110.

80   F. Dvornik, *La vie de saint Grégoire le Décapolite et les Slaves macédoniens au IXᵉ siècle* (Paris, 1926); *Vita Eliae Iunioris (BHG 580)*, *AASS* 37, 17 August, 479–509.

81   See, e.g., the papal account of a rather complicated information-exchange network centered upon Sicily and involving the Carolingian court, the Aghlabid Emirate, the pope, the Sicilian stratēgos, and some Venetian merchants as dated to 813 (Leonis III, *Papae Epistolae* 10, MGH ep. 5, 97–99).

82   Molinari, "Sicily" (n. 30, above), 104–7; Vaccaro, "Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries" (n. 30, above), 50–61; L. Arcifa, "Contenitori da trasporto nella Sicilia bizantina (VIII–X secolo): Produzioni e circolazione, con appendice di Veronica Testolini," *Archeologia Medievale* 45 (2018): 281–89, 123–47; G. Cacciaguerra, "Città e mercati in transizione nel Mediterraneo altomedievale: Contenitori da trasporto, merci e scambi a Siracusa tra l'età bizantina e islamica," *Archeologia Medievale* 45 (2018): 281–89, 149–73.

83   Wickham, "Comacchio," 508; R. Hodges, "Adriatic Sea Trade in a European Perspective," in Gelichi and Hodges, *Da un mare all'altro*, 207–34, at 230–34; P. Arthur, "Aspects of Byzantine Economy: An Evaluation of Amphora Evidence from Italy," *BCH* Suppl. 18 (1989): 79–91; Arthur, "From Italy to the Aegean," 343–44.

84   Bruno and Cutajar, "Byzantine Malta" (n. 27, above), 534.

85   V. Prigent, "Mints, Coin Production, and Circulation," in Cosentino, *A Companion to Byzantine Italy* (n. 5, above), 328–58, at 341.

86   C. Morrisson, "Byzantine Money: Its Production and Circulation," in *The Economic History of Byzantium*, ed. A. Laiou (Washington, DC, 2002), 3:909–76, at 912. One can however wonder if the mint of Catania simply ceased to issue *decanummia* on this date; indeed, it is not clear if the appearance of the legend *Syrakousai* on the bronze coins issued under Justinian II represented the terminus post quem for the transferring of the mint from Catania to Syracuse as contemporary to the creation of the Sicilian theme (C. Morrison and V. Prigent, "La monetazione in Sicilia nell'età bizantina," in *Le Zecche Italiane fino all'Unità*, ed. L. Travaini [Rome, 2011], 1:427–34, at 427).

half of the Byzantine heartland, where coins minted in Constantinople naturally had pride of place. [87]

It would be tempting to regard Syracuse as an exceptional case of urban resilience because it remained the main administrative, political, and military center of the island, and it was the seat of the Sicilian metropolitan from the eighth or ninth century (fig. 2).[88] Although the city pulled back to the island of Ortygia, protected by a fortified isthmus, archaeology shows that the main road connecting the two most important quarters of the Roman city, Akradina and Neapolis, were majestically repaved in the second quarter of the seventh century.[89] One can conclude that in Syracuse, although the city shrank, the ancient street grid was at least partially maintained until the late ninth century, an occurrence also documented in urban sites across the empire (e.g., Kherson, Gortyn, Amorium, Naples, and Salamis-Constantia).[90] Moreover, the Syracusan harbor, protected by a double-walled enceinte (generically dated to the seventh to eighth century), also continued to be frequented by pilgrims, traders, diplomats, and officials, as the city remained a regular hub for travelers from both Constantinople and the Adriatic.[91] One can think here of the journeys of Willibald, who visited Catania and Syracuse before embarking for Constantinople in the early eighth century; Bishop Felix, who returned to Ravenna from Constantinople in 710; Daniel, a Byzantine ambassador sent from the Sicilian strategos to the Carolingian court in 799; and

the previously mentioned Gregory of Dekapolis in the early ninth century.[92]

The importance of the Sicilian–Adriatic shipping link also owed much to the extensive landholdings of the Ravennate archbishop on the island and later to the increasing military and political role of the Sicilian strategos in the Adriatic from the second quarter of the eighth century.[93] This gave increased relevance to both its southern coast—Otranto was reconquered for Constantinople and the theme of Kephalonia boasted a large fleet to guard access to eastern Sicily—and its northern crescent, where the duchy of Venice became the major political focus of the Byzantine Venetia Maritima following the 812 Treaty of Aachen with the Carolingians.[94]

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87   Morrisson, "La Sicile byzantine" (n. 30, above), 307–34; Prigent, "La circulation monétaire" (n. 36, above); Vaccaro, "Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," 50–55; A. M. Fallico and G. Guzzetta, "Recenti apporti alle testimonianze sugli abitati nella Sicilia orientale," in Carra Bonacasa, *Byzantino-Sicula 4* (n. 29, above); A. E. Laiou and C. Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge, 2007), 43; Guzzetta, "Moneta locale" (n. 30, above).

88   D. Deliyannis, "Bishops, Cities, and Historical Memories," in *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, 582–607, at 602; Cosentino, *Storia*, 322–23; idem, "La Sicilia, l'impero e il Mediterraneo" (n. 34, above), 83.

89   Day, *Afterlife of the Roman City* (n. 16, above), 190–91. See also R. Lanteri, "Siracusa: Il quartiere di Akradina fra tardo antico e alto medioevo," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina* (n. 29, above), 19–39, at 19–20.

90   Curta, "Postcards" (n. 9, above), 96–101.

91   On the city walls and their dating, see Lanteri, "Siracusa," 32; Maurici, "Le città" (n. 48, above), 122–24, 126; E. Kislinger, "La città bizantina in Sicilia come centro amministrativo," in *La Sicilia bizantina*, 147–68, at 151.

92   On Willibald's trip, see Hygeburc, *The Hodeporicon of Saint Willibald (circa 754 A.D.)*, trans. C. Bronlow (London, 1891), 24, 9–10; on Felix's journey, see Agnellus of Ravenna, *The Book of Pontiffs of the Church of Ravenna*, ed. D. Mauskopf-Deliyannis (Leiden, 2006), 253–55 (the text mentions a layover in Trapani, but as the editor commented, this stems from a literary topos, as the regular shipping route skimmed the eastern coast of Sicily and cannot have touched upon the rather distant cape of Pachino); on Daniel, see *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur: Annales laurissenses maiores et Einhardi (Latin Edition)* (Neuilly-sur-Seine, 2012), 799; on Gregory of Dekapolis, see n. 80, above. For a full overview of these and other trips with reference to all the literary and documentary sources, see Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met*, 29–70; McCormick, *Origins*, 852–972.

93   Prigent, "Notes sur l'évolution," 397–401. It is interesting to note that exactly from the 730s until the creation of the theme of Kephalonia, in the second quarter of the eighth century as stated by Curta and Kislinger (F. Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge, 2006], 349–52; E. Kislinger, "Dyrrhachion und die Küsten von Epirus und Dalmatien im frühen Mittelalter: Beobachtungen zur Entwicklung der byzantinischen Oberhoheit," *Millennium: Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n.Chr.* 8 [2011]: 332–33), we can trace the increasing meddling of the strategos based in Syracuse in Dalmatian political affairs, as seen in both a contemporary hagiographic source (the Life of Saint Pankratios of Taormina, dated to the early eighth century) and numismatic evidence (a surge of gold coins of Constantine V that is documented in Dalmatia); see C. Stallman-Pacitti, *The Life of Saint Pankratios of Taormina* (Leiden, 2018), 316–17; Curta, *Southeastern Europe*, 105–6; N. Budak, "One More Renaissance? Dalmatia and the Revival of the European Economy," in *Imperial Spheres and the Adriatic*, 174–91, at 179.

94   On the Kephalonian fleet, see Kislinger, "Dyrrhachion," 330–31, with reference to the primary sources; on the northern Adriatic crescent, see S. Gelichi, "The Venetiae, the Exarchate, and the Pentapolis," in *A Companion to Byzantine Italy*, 360–85, at 372–73.

Fig. 2.   Syracuse, Temple of Athena converted into the cathedral. Late seventh century. Photo by author.

Finally, one should note the importance of the Sicilian agrarian economy in this period.[95] As Wickham concludes:

> After the fall of Egypt to the Persians and then the Arabs, Sicily matched North Africa as the major agrarian resources of the Byzantine empire, and after the fall of Africa a generation later Sicily was on its own as a bread-basket, throughout the eighth century and into the early ninth.[96]

This obviously bolstered the economic vitality of those cities and harbors on the eastern coast of the island, which is also demonstrated by the sigillographic evidence and the globular amphorae network.

The bustling economic life of Syracuse is also evidenced by D-shaped buckles, possibly made locally, which pair with other works of local jewelers or metalworkers, pointing to sustained commercial (and other) contacts between Sicily and the rest of the Byzantine world.[97] Indeed, recent archaeological excavations at Akradina have shed light on an artisanal quarter along one of the main thoroughfares, which in all probability benefited from the water supplied by an aqueduct that remained in use well into the eighth century.[98] The aqueduct may have also supplied some local baths that

95 Haldon, *Empire That Would Not Die* (n. 11, above), 27–28, 207–12.
96 Wickham, "Comacchio," 508.

97 Decker, *Byzantine Dark Ages* (n. 10, above), 171.
98 Lanteri, "Siracusa," 29. See also Arcifa, "Trasformazioni urbane" (n. 49, above), 33.

were still functioning in the ninth century; this reminds us of another thematic capital: Amorium.[99] All in all, Akradina seems not to have been abandoned until the fall of Syracuse, as also evidenced by a residential quarter yielding material indicators for the eighth and ninth century: locally produced tiles with striped decorations and lamps "a ciabatta."[100] This find allowed the excavators to point to areas of development and frequentation beyond the main administrative and religious islet of Ortygia, where a residential/artisanal quarter was similarly excavated in the Roman forum and remained active until the beginning of the ninth century.[101]

In fact, Ortygia could be regarded as the administrative and religious heart of the city in the transitional period, for both the local metropolitan and the fiscal and military representatives of the central Constantinopolitan government resided there.[102] For instance, as Haldon points out, "it was from his new capital Syracuse [that] Constans II issued legislation on fiscal matters regarding the western provinces."[103] This is clearly reflected by the urban topography, which in Ortygia seems to have replicated Constantinople. One can mention here the double-walled enceinte, which related to its status as a Byzantine thematic capital from the early eighth century, or the refurbishment of some public spaces with the installation of new porticoes, along with a number of city streets.[104] We also know

that in Syracuse, churches were actively restored or built from scratch, as shown by the conversion of the Temple of Athena into the city cathedral sometime in the late seventh century (see fig. 2). The cathedral became the seat of the newly appointed local metropolitan, who had jurisdiction over the other Sicilian bishoprics.[105] Furthermore, the sigillographic evidence points to both the provenance of the local *strategoi* (mostly eunuchs dispatched directly from the imperial palace) and the presence in the city of *kommerkiaroi* (in charge of providing Constantinople and the army with grain and other supplies) and *topoteretai* (officers leading elite military corps).[106] This allows us to conclude that Syracuse, with its two main "islands of settlements" (Akradina and Ortygia), had extraordinary importance within the military (and political) Byzantine networks of power, which lasted until the city was conquered by the Arabs in 878.

As the seals show, the political and military relevance of Syracuse certainly contributed to the resilience of its urban landscape. Indeed, Cacciaguerra has sketched an all-encompassing overview of the ceramics recovered, among other areas, from the forum. This has led him to conclude that the presence of both regionally and locally made pottery (cooking wares of the so-called Santa Caterina type and tableware) and imported vessels (globular amphorae) demonstrates a sustained level of local consumption as well as exchange with southern Italy, southern Ionia, and the Aegean basin.[107] These did not stem exclusively from the "dirigiste" presence of Constantinopolitan authorities but from trade and commercial activities that continued even during the repeated Arab incursions from the late seventh century onward.[108]

99   Arcifa, "Trasformazioni urbane," 32. On the baths in Amorium, see E. Ivison, "Amorium" (n. 15, above), 45; Decker, *Byzantine Dark Ages*, 111.

100   On the tiles with striped decoration (*decorate a pettine*), see L. Arcifa, "Nuove ipotesi a partire dalla rilettura dei dati archeologici: La Sicilia orientale," in *La Sicile de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. A. Nef and V. Prigent (Paris, 2010), 1–47, at 29–31; on the lamps "a ciabatta," see G. Cacciaguerra, "Siracusa nel contesto socio-economico del Mediterraneo tardoantico e altomedievale: Le ceramiche bizantine e islamiche dei contesti di Piazza Minerva e del Foro Siracusano," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 55–95, at 56 with further bibliography.

101   L. Guzzardi, S. Raffiotta, and A. Rivoli, "Siracusa: Le aree del Foro Siracusano e di Piazza Minerva fra la tarda antichità e l'alto medioevo," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 41–53, at 51.

102   Kislinger, "La città bizantina," 149–51.

103   Haldon, *Empire That Would Not Die*, 207.

104   Day, *Afterlife of the Roman City*, 190–91; Maurici, "La città," 123; L. Arcifa, "Per un nuovo approccio allo studio delle città Siciliane nell'alto-medioevo: Catania e Siracusa fra VIII e IX Secolo," in *Silenziose rivoluzioni: La Sicilia dalla tarda antichità al primo medioevo; Atti dell'Incontro di Studio (Catania–Piazza Armerina, 21–23 maggio 2015)*, ed. C. Giuffrida and M. Cassia (Catania, 2016), 427–37.

105   Kislinger, "La città," 154–55.

106   Most of the Sicilian *stratēgoi* were indeed dispatched from the *Cubiculum* (the imperial bedchamber), one of the most important offices of the central administration (Nichanian and Prigent, "Les stratèges" [n. 36, above], 98; on the *Cubiculum*, see A. Kazhdan, "Koiton," in *ODB* 2:1137). On the topoteretai, see V. Prigent, "Note sur le topotèrètès de cite en Italie méridionale durant les siècles obscurs de Sicile," *SBS* 9 (2006): 145–58; see also Arcifa, "Trasformazioni urbane," 35–36; Prigent, "La Sicile" (n. 30, above), 39–41; Kislinger, "La città," 150–53; Nef and Prigent, "Per una nuova storia" (n. 62, above), 34–35. On the Sicilian kommerkiarioi and their role in provisioning the capital, see Haldon, *Empire That Would Not Die*, 260–63 with further bibliography.

107   Cacciaguerra, "Siracusa," 79–81. On the "Santa Caterina wares," see also Cacciaguerra, "Dinamiche insediative" (n. 30, above), 445–51.

108   Cacciaguerra, "Siracusa," 81. See also Arthur, "From Italy to the Aegean" (n. 43, above), 348–52; Arcifa, "Nuove ipotesi," 26–27.

In fact, other coastal Sicilian cities survived but experienced functional and structural changes to their urban landscape and socioeconomic fabric. To the north of the capital, Catania was an important pilgrimage hub, as witnessed by Willibald in the early eighth century.[109] The city was endowed with impressive walls, including the acropolis overlooking the harbor.[110] Seals of local topoteretai attest the presence of Byzantine military forces.[111] Recent archaeological excavations there have yielded evidence for continued use of the city (e.g., in the area of the theater) with the development of two religious foci: the pilgrimage shrine dedicated to Saint Agatha, located next to the northern section of the walls; and the so-called Rotunda, dedicated to the *Theotokos*, a former bath that fell out of use in the sixth century. The church was further refurbished in the seventh century and continued in use until the sixteenth century.[112] Indeed, archaeological evidence pairs with the activity of the Catanese bishops, as well as those of Taormina, Agrigento, Messina, and Lentini, "who came under the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople [after 730s] and tried to raise the status of their sees by identifying bishop-saints from whatever histories [hagiographies] they could find, in order to promote the apostolic origins of their cities."[113] Indeed, in Catania, both hagiographical sources (the ninth-century Life of Saint Leo) and the recently discovered globular amphorae, glazed wares, and chafing dishes point to the link between the Catanese harbor, the Tyrrhenian area, and Constantinople via the Ionian Sea.[114] Urban archaeology in Catania has also shed light on a new chronological marker: the so-called *ceramica a stuoia*. This type of cooking ware was the "successor," in chronological,

morphological, and typological terms, of the Santa Caterina type.[115] It boasts a distinctive decoration and has been dated to the ninth century from stratigraphic association with early ninth-century Byzantine coins at the site of Rocchicella di Mineo on the Catanese plain.[116] These ceramics have also been documented in Syracuse (in layers dating to the ninth and tenth centuries) and in villages along the inland routes connecting Catania with Agrigento and Palermo, as well as in the "agro-town" of Philosophiana.[117] The last-named is revealed as an active center of pottery production located not far from the famous Roman Villa del Casale, and it remained active between the seventh and the ninth centuries.[118] This points to the continuous frequenting of the main roads linking the city with its immediate hinterland, as also shown by the Catanese urban street grid, which continued to spill out from the city gates, effectively connecting the city to its hinterland.[119]

Moreover, as this pottery cannot be found in the western part of Sicily, we are reminded of the partition of the island into two distinct systems of exchange, an impression enhanced by analysis of the productive and distributive network of globular amphorae.[120] These wine containers were produced between the seventh and the tenth centuries with different types, style, and morphology in the eastern Mediterranean as well as in the south Adriatic (Otranto) and the Bay of Naples area.[121]

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109 See n. 92, above.

110 L. Arcifa, "La città nel Medioevo: Sviluppo urbano e dominio territoriale," in *Catania: L'identità urbana dall'antichità al settecento*, ed. L. Scalisi (Catania, 2009); Arcifa, "Per un nuovo approccio," 422–27; Maurici, "La città," 127–33.

111 Arcifa, "La città nel Medioevo," 78–79.

112 M. G. Branciforte, "Continuità e trasformazioni di Catina romana tra il tardo antico e l'alto medioevo," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 98–11, at 98–102; see also Arcifa, "Trasformazioni urbane," 35–36. On the different phasi della Rotunda, see A. Taormina, "Dalle necropoli di Catania nuove testimonianze archeologiche tra età romana ed alto medioevo: Continuità e innovazione," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 113–35, at 129–33.

113 Deliyannis, "Bishops," 604–5.

114 Cacciaguerra, "La ceramica" (n. 30, above), 287–88.

115 Taormina, "Dalle necropoli," 129; Cacciaguerra, "Dinamiche insediative," 444; idem, "Siracusa," 81.

116 R. Longo, "Produzioni ceramiche di Rocchicella," in *Dopo l'Antico: Ricerche di archeologia medievale*, ed. L. Arcifa and L. Maniscalco (Palermo, 2016), 29–46.

117 E. Vaccaro, "Philosophiana in Central Sicily in the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods: Settlement and Economy," in *Encounters, Excavations, and Argosies: Essays for Richard Hodges*, ed. J. Moreland, J. Mitchell, and B. Leal (Oxford, 2017), 303–13; Cacciaguerra, "Siracusa," 61–62.

118 E. Vaccaro, "La produzione di ceramica a Philosophiana (Sicilia centrale) nella media età bizantina: Metodi di indagine ed implicazioni economiche," *Archeologia Medievale* 42 (2015): 53–94; Vaccaro, "Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," 43–45.

119 Arcifa, "La città nel Medioevo," 70–77.

120 L. Arcifa, "Insularità siciliana e Mediterraneo altomedievale: Dati archeologici e quadri territoriali fra VIII e IX secolo," in *Southern Italy as Contact Area and Border Region in the Middle Ages*, ed. K. Wolf and K. Herbers, Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte (Frankfurt, 2018), 125–48.

121 J. Vroom, "The Byzantine Web: Pottery and Connectivity between the Southern Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean," in

They are described as perfect liquid containers for short and long distances and for local/regional distribution,[122] because they were easy to handle during loading and unloading, often in simply equipped harbors.[123] As these types of amphorae were made in different coastal and insular areas of the Byzantine koine, they could also pair with painted wares and chafing dishes produced in various workshops in Cyprus as well as Crete, southern Anatolia, Cherson, and southern Italy, and circulated throughout the Mediterranean.[124] As Vroom concludes, they point to "an intra-regional long-distance or cabotage movement of wares/small globular amphorae as well as an active interregional exchange between shipping zones (with overlapping networks of production and distribution)."[125]

In Sicily, specimens imported from the eastern manufacturing centers were mostly found in Syracuse, Catania, and Taormina as opposed to those discovered in Cefalù and Palermo, for the northern coast of the island was integral to the Tyrrhenian exchange system that gravitated toward papal Rome, Amalfi, and Naples.[126] This leads to the conclusion that urban life did not abandon the insular coastline, not even in the wake of repeated Arab raids or after the fall of Carthage in 698.[127] It also clearly indicates, as Maurici remarks: "Sicily remained a land of cities during the entire Byzantine period."[128]

In this light, a further example of resilient urbanism can be offered by Palermo. Located on the northwestern coast of Sicily and developing in the shadow of its all-encompassing harbor (in Greek, *pan-ormos*), Palermo "returned" to Byzantium in 535, when Belisarius besieged and conquered the city:

> Belisarius ordered the fleet to sail into the harbor, which extended right up to the wall. . . . Now when the ships had anchored there, it was seen that the masts were higher than the parapet. Immediately, then, he filled all the small boats of the ships with archers and hoisted them to the tops of the masts. When the enemy was being shot at from these boats above, they fell into such an irresistible fear that they immediately delivered Palermo to Belisarius by surrender.[129]

The harbor and the walls continued to define the urban landscape in the sixth and seventh centuries.[130] The enceinte seems to have been maintained and restored, for the local Byzantine garrison was able to withstand the Aghlabids for an entire year when they besieged the city in 830–831.[131] Moreover, and despite the lack of good urban archaeology for the period in question, we can still catch glimpses of Palermitan fabric, landscape, and urban structures. For instance, the urban street grid was maintained in a way that reminds us of Syracuse.[132] Gregory the Great repeatedly mentioned Palermo in his epistles, for the city was the seat of one of the two *rectores patrimonii* in charge of the landholdings belonging to the Church of Rome.[133] Indeed, Gregory also refers to the local cathedral, built, perhaps, at the end of the sixth century, at the intersection of the *cardo* and one of the minor *decumani*.[134]

Adriatico altomedievale (VI–XI secolo): Scambi, porti, produzioni, ed. S. Gelichi and C. Negrelli (Rome, 2017), 285–313, at 293.

122   J. Vroom, "From One Coast to Another: Early Medieval Ceramics in the Southern Adriatic Region," in Gelichi and Hodges, *Da un mare all'altro*, 353–92, at 374.

123   J. Vroom, "Ceramics," in *Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia* (n. 10, above), 176–93, at 182–86.

124   Ibid., 181–82.

125   Vroom, "From One Coast to Another," 391.

126   Vaccaro, "Sicily in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," 56–60; F. Ardizzone, E. Pezzini, F. Agrò, and F. Pisciotta, "Dati sulla circolazione della ceramica e sulle rotte del Mediterraneo occidentale attraverso i contesti tardo antichi e medievali di Marettimo," in *IX Congresso internazionale sulla ceramica medievale nel Mediterraneo*, ed. S. Gelichi (Venice, 2012), 173–78.

127   W. Treadgold, *A History of Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997), 337–38; Wickham, *Inheritance of Rome* (n. 1, above), 266.

128   Maurici, "La città" (n. 48, above), 113.

129   Procopius, *Bell. Goth*, I.5.12–16; H. B. Dewing, *Prokopios: The Wars of Justinian* (Indianapolis, 2014), 263.

130   V. Prigent, "Palermo in the Eastern Roman Empire," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo: The History of a Mediterranean City from 600 to 1500*, ed. A. Nef (Leiden, 2018), 11–38, at 7–8.

131   F. Maurici, *Palermo Araba: Una sintesi dell'evoluzione urbanistica (831–1072)* (Palermo, 2015), 27. A detailed description of the siege is in Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, in M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, vol. 1 (Turin and Rome, 1880), 364–69.

132   Day, *Afterlife of the Roman City* (n. 16, above), 189–90; Maurici, *Palermo Araba,* 30–32; Prigent, "Palermo," 37–38.

133   E. Caliri, *Per la storia della Sicilia nell'età di Gregorio Magno* (Messina, 1997), 38–40, 75–78.

134   As for the Palermitan cathedral, it is mentioned in *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum epistularum*, ed. D. Norberg (Turnhout, 1982), 12:23, 583. On the cathedral dedicated to the Theotokos, see Maurici, *Palermo Araba*, 32.

From the seventh century onward, the city became the main political and religious reference point for the western part of Byzantine Sicily, as shown by the sigillographic evidence pointing to the existence of a local *archon* in charge of local political affairs.[135] As Prigent concludes, "Palermo was the only city in the province to have an [archon as a] governor (confirming its intrinsic importance) of its own although its functions can only be vaguely identified as administering the town and commanding particular units of the navy."[136]

In truth, it seems that the Palermitan harbor remained active well into the eighth century and beyond. This is documented by both material (the globular amphorae yielded by urban excavations) and literary evidence mentioning the journeys undertaken by saints (Saint Gregory of Agrigento in the early seventh century), refugees (the Antiochian father of the future Pope Sergius I), and local bishops who traveled to Rome in 649 (Lateran Synod) and Nicaea in 787 (Seventh Ecumenical Council).[137]

Thus, Palermo, in the same vein as Catania and Syracuse, seems to have retained a level of economic activity bolstered by the presence of elites, both ecclesiastical (the bishop) and secular (the archon); they supported the maintenance of the urban street grid and kept up major functional landmarks like the cathedral (converted into a mosque in 831, and later completely destroyed and rebuilt by the Normans in the eleventh century) and the walls.[138] Palermo, like Catania and Syracuse, also boasted a lively harbor, which propelled it into the Tyrrhenian exchange system and the southern Ionian and Aegean shipping routes.[139] As we have seen, archaeology and material culture allow us to regard these harbors as part of the koine. The different political and strategic roles played by Sicilian urban outposts chime with their common importance as vectors for regional and trans-Mediterranean commerce. Indeed, as Arthur remarks, "we are confronted with a series of sites and artifacts that have come to light across the Mediterranean that suggest a certain common intent and cultural unity on a number of different levels across and within Byzantine controlled territory."[140]

Although the Sicilian cities diminished in size and population, the coherence of the urban landscape and the reorganization of their urban planning and fabric stemmed less from fear of Arab naval threats and more from the ability of local elites to navigate the changing political, administrative, and military Tyrrhenian flux.[141] This is not to deny that—as we have seen— the cities were endowed with new fortified areas, but merely to counter the idea that urban life was limited to small *intra-moenia* areas or new inland fortresses like Castronovo (in the late seventh century), Enna, and Ragusa and Butera (in the ninth century).[142]

The case of Castronovo is particularly relevant, for, although established at the same time as the creation of the Sicilian theme, it remained in use in the first half of the ninth century when the need to protect the Sicilian capital from the advancing Aghlabid armies became paramount (as enhanced by the foundation of the *kastra* of Butera and Ragusa).[143] Although only its walls have been carefully surveyed and studied, the

135   L. Salinas, "Sigilli diplomatici italo greci," *Periodico di numismatica e sfragistica per la storia d'Italia* 6 (1874): 96–98.

136   Prigent, "Palermo," 24.

137   J. R. C. Martyn, *A Translation of Abbot Leontios' Life of Saint Gregory, Bishop of Agrigento* (Lewiston, NY, 2004), 167, 177; for the life of Pope Sergius I (687–701), see *Liber Pontificalis* 86 (PL 89:9–34). On the Palermitan bishops, see Prigent, "Palermo," 13–14.

138   On the conversion of the late antique cathedral into a mosque, see Maurici, *Palermo Araba*, 44–47. For the urban development of Palermo after the Aghlabid conquest and its transformation into *madīna Balarm*, see A. Bagnera, "Lo sviluppo urbano di Palermo in età islamica: Nuovi punti di osservazione," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina* (n. 29, above), 314–28; A. Nef, "Islamic Palermo and the *Dār al-Islām:* Politics, Society, and Economy (from the Mid-9th to the mid-11th Century)," in *A Companion to Medieval Palermo*, 39–59.

139   D. Sami, "The Network of Interregional Roads and Harbours," in Cosentino, *A Companion to Byzantine Italy* (n. 5, above), 255–277, at 269.

140   Arthur, "From Italy to the Aegean," 339.

141   Arcifa, "Per un nuovo approccio," 418; Maurici, "La città," 135–37.

142   Maurici, "La città," 132; L. Arcifa and R. Longo, "Processi di diversificazione territoriale nella Sicilia di inizi IX secolo: Il contesto di Rocchicella–Mineo (CT)," in *VII Congresso nazionale di archeologia medievale*, vol. 2.4, *Luoghi di culto e archeologia funeraria*, ed. P. Arthur and M. L. Imperiale (Florence, 2016), 361–66, at 365.

143   Arcifa, "Insularità siciliana," 35–36; Molinari, "Sicily" (n. 30, above), 93–100; A. Castrorao Barba, "Entroterra fra due mari: Il territorio di Castronovo di Sicilia (Palermo) fra età romana e periodo bizantino," in *Storia e archeologia globale 2: I pascoli, i campi, il mare; Paesaggi d'altura e di pianura in Italia dall'Età del Bronzo al Medioevo*, ed. F. Cambi, G. De Venuto, and R. Goffredo (Bari, 2015), 253–67, at 262; L. Arcifa, "Romaioi e Saraceni intorno all'827: Riflessioni sui tema della frontiera," in *La Sicilia del IX secolo tra Bizantini e*

erection of the imposing fortress, the so-called Kassar, seems to have been the result of a calculated effort by the thematic/imperial government to create a strategic line of defense away from the coast and shield the southeastern coastal cities in the decades that followed the institution of the theme and the creation of a new bishopric along the northern coasts.[144] Sited above the intersection of the main north–south and east–west inland axis crisscrossing the island, Castronovo was foisted upon the rarefied urban life along the southwestern coast. Agrigento, for instance, was reduced to a few small "agro-towns" crowning the administrative and possibly religious center on the acropolis of Girgenti, whereas Lilibeo, on the homonymous western cape of the island, lay in ruins at the end of the seventh century.[145]

In a similar but more urban vein is Enna, a strategically located and heavily fortified center in the heart of Sicily.[146] Enna remains an "invisible city" due to its geomorphological formation and the fact that each new layer of building activity "peeled off," rather than added to, the rocky outcrop where the city had grown since the Hellenistic period.[147] Nevertheless, we know that the city was the birthplace of one of the most famous Sicilian saints: Elias the Younger.[148] Elias's lifetime encompassed

the whole Sicilian ninth century (823–903), as he was born on the eve of the Aghlabid invasion and traveled widely across the Mediterranean, where he worked miracles for "Saracens" and Christians alike, although he never reached Constantinople. He was also captured twice by Saracens; the first time he was saved by the Byzantine fleet, but he was sold into slavery the second time.[149] In other words, his life is a tribute to the centrality of Sicily in the Mediterranean shipping routes as well as the rather complex pattern of political, diplomatic, and military relationships between the Byzantines and the Muslims in this period.[150] Although his hagiography was written a century later in Calabria, it nevertheless faithfully reports a Muslim raid against Enna, whose fortified castle was also one of the first targets of the Aghlabid invasion, as mentioned by the later Arab chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr.[151] Indeed, the Life of Saint Elias mentions that Enna "was destroyed by the Saracens from Carthage forcing the saint's family to move to the castle [κάστρον] of Santa Maria for shelter."[152]

Recent archaeological investigations have shed light on the articulated fortified settlement pattern, which included two sets of walls: one protecting the lower town and the other encasing the upper fortress (Castello di Lombardia; fig. 3).[153] Here is a rather more elaborate urbanistic model than in Castronovo, one that reminds us of cities like Amorium, Ankara, or Corinth, as they all boasted a fortified citadel perched above a lower town protected by a second enceinte.[154] Indeed, in Enna, the military had pride of place, for no

Musulmani: Atti del IX Convegno di Studi, ed. S. Modeo, M. Congiu, and L. Santagati (Caltanissetta, 2013), 161–81, at 169.

144 S. Vassallo, "Il Kastron di Castronovo di Sicilia: Fortezza o città mai nata?," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 241–48, at 246; Arcifa, "Byzantine Sicily" (n. 38, above), 482.

145 Nevertheless, in Agrigento, the survival of the classical street grid and the presence of two pottery workshops, the erection of the new cathedral dedicated to Saint Gregory (possibly in the seventh century), and a second basilica near the so-called Villa of Athena (restored in the ninth century) run counter to the idea of an abandonment of the city after the loss of Byzantine North Africa in the face of dangerous Arab raids. On Agrigento, see Zavagno, "Islands in the Stream" (n. 3, above), 163, and F. Ardizzone, "Trasformazione dello spazio pubblico ad Agrigento: La Valle dei Templi tra tardoantico e altomedioevo," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 253–66.

146 C. Bonanno, L. Guzzardi, and E. Canzonieri, "Da Henna a Qasryannah: I dati di scavo nell'area del castello di Lombardia," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina*, 193–204, at 193.

147 E. Giannitrapani, R. Nicoletti, and F. Valbruzzi, "Nuovi dati provenienti dalle indagini archeologiche presso la Rocca di Cerere a Enna: Crisi e trasformazione delle strutture urbane in età tardoantica e altomedievale," in Arcifa and Sgarlata, *From Polis to Madina,* 173–91, at 173–74.

148 See n. 80, above, and G. Rossi Taibbi, *Vita di Sant'Elia il Giovane*, Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici, Testi 7

(Palermo, 1962), 1–123. See also McCormick, *Origins* (n. 61, above), 244–45.

149 Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met* (n. 76, above), 60. On the life, see Re, "Italo-Greek Hagiography" (n. 29, above), 234 with further bibliography.

150 Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met*, 99.

151 Ibn el-Athir, *Annales du Maghreb, et de l'Espagne*, trans. E. Fagnan (Alger, 1898), 189–90; https://archive.org/details/ibnelathir annaleooibna. Indeed, Ibn al-Athīr wrote his work in the thirteenth century.

152 Davis-Secord, *Where Three Worlds Met*, 108; *Vita Eliae Iunioris* (n. 80, above), c. 3, 55–58.

153 Bonanno, Guzzardi, and Canzonieri, "Da Henna a Qasryannah," 196.

154 On Amorium, see nn. 15 and 99, above; on Ankara, see U. Peschlow, "Ancyra," in *Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia* (n. 10, above), 349–60; on Corinth, see Decker, *Byzantine Dark Ages* (n. 10, above), 98–108.

Fig. 3.   Enna, Castello di Lombardia. Photo by author.

bishopric is documented.[155] A large effort was made by the Byzantine authorities to strengthen the local defense vis-à-vis the Aghlabid invasions in the early ninth century. This is shown by both the seal of one Theodore *toporeita* and the excavations at "Contrada Santa Ninfa," where a new fortification and a temporary military installation were built by the Byzantines over a former sanctuary and later reused by the Aghlabids when they finally conquered the city.[156] Finally, it is worth mentioning that the ceramic evidence yielded both at Santa Ninfa and from emergency excavations in the lower town includes globular amphorae,

ceramica a stuoia, and cooking wares (similar to specimens found in other areas of the island like Cefalú and Marettimo), and small amphorae of a type also found at Crypta Balbi.[157] They all date to the period between the eighth and tenth centuries, and—pending future and further investigations—may point to a settlement that remained well connected with the insular coastal centers while also assuming a preeminent and strategic role in the military confrontation with the Aghlabids.[158]

Although its impressive walls convey a message of military might, status, and prestige, Enna cannot be compared to Kastro Apalirou in Naxos and Oxa in Crete.[159] Settlements like those represented a new type of hilltop, fortified, seventh-to-eighth-century

155   Maurici, "Le città," 128–29.

156   On the excavations at Contrada Santa Ninfa, see Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, and Valbruzzi, "Nuovi dati." On Theodore's seal, see Arcifa, "Trasformazioni urbane," 36; Bonanno, Guzzardi, and Canzonieri, "Da Henna a Qasryannah," 193.

157   Giannitrapani, Nicoletti, and Valbruzzi, "Nuovi dati," 182–87.

158   Ibid.

159   See n. 24, above.

urbanism, suggesting scale, complexity, and imperial sponsorship: large walled settlements with a dense urban fabric made up of houses and cisterns, but surprisingly few religious buildings.[160] Indeed, they present a new model that breaks with the late antique urban environment and fabric. Such settlements provided locations where local elites, as in the case of Saint Elias's family, could reside and retain a degree of control over the nearby plains and their landholdings.[161] Enna, therefore, can be regarded as a different tone in the palette of the insular urban types. It combined and rearranged strategic and military, political and administrative, as well as economic functions along different lines in terms of urban fabric, plan, landscape, and architecture, and was free from the constraints of the old Roman and late antique *polis*.

With the Sicilian case study in mind, we can now move to Sardinia, which after the 660s acquired increasing importance as a Byzantine naval base in the central Mediterranean against the Muslims and other enemies (the Lombards and later the Franks).[162] Moreover, the loss of North Africa resulted in the transfer of the African mint to Cagliari, which remained active until the first quarter of the eighth century.[163] The scarce evidence related to coinage and monetary circulation indicates the presence of Umayyad, Byzantine, and Lombard coins on the island.[164] Their contemporary circulation in Sardinia testifies to a transregional and transcultural acceptance of different monetary units in a way that reminds us of contemporary Cyprus and the Balearics;[165] it also indicates that Sardinia was at the crossroads of diminishing but still vital Tyrrhenian shipping routes. Globular amphorae and Forum Wares show that Sardinia's coastal cities intersected with regional and long-distance commercial networks reaching Rome, Constantinople, and, via the Balearics, Umayyad Spain.[166]

Recent excavations at the city harbor of Olbia have yielded evidence of continuous commercial activities well into the ninth century (although with a low point in the seventh century), which runs counter to the traditional narrative of the city's abandonment after a Vandal incursion in the sixth century or as the consequence of a supposed first Arab attack against the island, dated by Kaegi to 662–663.[167] Hagiographic sources like the Life of Saint Senzius of Blera also confirm that tramping routes along the eastern coast of Sardinia and linking the island with Tuscany were still frequented in the eighth century.[168]

Unfortunately, good urban archaeology exists for only a few Sardinian urban sites for the period under scrutiny here. This owes less to the repeated Arab raids that targeted the island from the mid-seventh century and more to the lack of attention that urban archaeologists gave to Vandal and Byzantine layers in excavations

160   Turner and Crow, "Christianization" (n. 24, above), 228–29.

161   Castrorao Barba, "Entroterra fra due mari," 170; Arcifa, "Insularità siciliana," 143.

162   P. G. Spanu and R. Zucca, *I sigilli bizantini della Sardegna* (Rome, 2004); P. G. Spanu and R. Zucca, "Nuovi documenti epigrafici della Sardegna bizantina," in *Epigrafia romana in ΣΑΡΔΗΝΙΑ: Atti del I convegno di studio Sant'Antioco, 14–15 luglio 2007 (Incontri insulari, 1)*, ed. F. Cenerini and P. Ruggeri (Rome, 2008), 147–72; Cosentino, "La Sardegna" (n. 31, above), 65–68; Kaegi, "Byzantine Sardinia Threatened" (n. 62, above), 51. On the Lombard attempt to conquer the island, see L. Galoppini, "Overview of Sardinian History," in Hobart, *A Companion to Sardinian History* (n. 31, above), 83–114, at 90.

163   P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coins* (Berkeley, 1982), 122; Cosentino, "La Sardegna," 65; Zavagno, "Islands in the Stream," 159.

164   Fois, "Il ruolo della Sardegna" (n. 62, above), 19; McCormick, *Origins*, 355.

165   Zavagno, "Going to the Extremes" (n. 40, above), 150.

166   E. Sanna, "Contenitori da trasporto anforici tra VIII e XI secolo: Dati e problemi," in *Settecento–Millecento: Storia, archeologia e arte nei "secoli bui" del Mediterraneo; Dalle fonti scritte, archeologiche ed artistiche alla ricostruzione della vicenda storica. La Sardegna laboratorio di esperienze culturali*, ed. R. Martorelli, vol. 1 (Cagliari, 2013), 675–704, at 685; also D. Corda, "Le produzioni ceramiche: Manifatture locali e importazione," in *Corpora delle antichità della Sardegna: La Sardegna romana e altomedievale; Storia e materiali*, ed. S. Angiolillo, R. Martorelli, M. Giuman, A. M. Corda, and D. Artizzu (Cagliari, 2017), 279–84. Forum Ware is the name given to a type of heavy lead-glazed fine wares mostly produced in Rome and Campania in the late eighth and ninth centuries, heavily influenced by the glazed technology already available in Constantinople; see Wickham, *Framing* (n. 4, above), 122, and D. B. Whitehouse, "Forum Ware: A Distinctive Type of Early Medieval Glazed Pottery in the Roman Campagna," *Medieval Archaeology* 9.1 (1965): 55–63.

167   R. Martorelli, "Le città in Sardegna fra tardoantico ed altomedioevo," in *Corpora delle antichità della Sardegna*, 265–78; Kaegi, "Byzantine Sardinia Threatened," 47–48.

168   *BHL* 7581; *AASS* Mai 5, 70–72 (= 1741, 536–39); see N. Everett, "The Life of Saint Senzius of Blera and Episcopal Appropriation of Monastic Cults in Early Medieval Tuscany," *RSCI* 2 (2015): 315–34. For an overview of the Byzantine sources mentioning Sardinia, see J. Koder, "Sardinien in byzantinische Quellen," in Corrias and Cosentino, *Ai confini dell'impero* (n. 31, above), 69–78.

conducted before the 1980s.[169] As Milanese remarks, "in Sardinia urban archaeology is limited to the resolution of specific problems, precise investigations or the archaeological reclamation of certain areas subject to public works; these are the main reasons behind the still limited discovery."[170] Nevertheless, the scant evidence at our disposal has recently led scholars like Galoppini to conclude tentatively that "coastal Sardinian cities maintained a noteworthy vitality well into the eighth century, thanks to their strong [inter-Tyrrhenian] commercial and cultural ties with the Italian peninsula as well as the coastal regions of Africa."[171] In other words, once again we are confronted not with an impermeable frontier set up by opposing polities and frequented only by military forces, but rather with a borderland paradigm built upon an integrative and connective function of insular urban hubs.[172] Though the Mediterranean shipping routes were indeed more fragmented and slower in circulating goods and people than in late antiquity, we nevertheless witness an intensification of local trade with other coastal areas of the Tyrrhenian-Byzantine koine, as shown by globular amphorae made in different centers of the Gulf of Naples or the Forum Wares recovered from the island.[173] To these, one should add a wide array of local products (painted and common wares, which are, however, often difficult to date), pointing to an intraregional production and distribution network and resilient artisanal activities.[174]

The results of recent excavations at Cagliari—combined with literary and material evidence—confirm that the city remained the religious and political capital of the island even after the administrative reorganization introduced by Justinian,[175] which divided powers between the military dux in Forum Traiani-Chrysopolis and the civic *praes* (governor) in Cagliari.[176] Moreover, according to a famous customs list written in Latin and dated to the late sixth century, the city was the most important market for the entire southern agricultural hinterland of the island.[177] Cagliari, like Palermo and Catania, boasted an impressive set of walls mentioned by Procopius and Gregory the Great, which have only been poorly excavated.[178] In late antiquity, Cagliari developed into an array of urban "islands" taking advantage of the local terrain. Recently, Martorelli has proposed a sort of duplication of the urban fabric and landscape of Cagliari, with the harbor being pivotal in promoting commercial and artisanal activities as well as intercultural (and interreligious) contacts, enhanced by the presence of Greek monastic institutions in the city and by the church of Santa Maria de portu grutti.[179]

Indeed, the large Caralitan harbor was squeezed between major eastern and western conurbations. The eastern one contained the well-excavated sanctuary of Saint Saturnino, an important pilgrimage church built around his martyrium.[180] The sanctuary and the attached necropolis (in use until the late seventh

176   *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistolarum* 11:12, 898. Gregory mentions one Spesindeo as *praesidem Sardiniae* in a letter dated to 600; another *praes* is mentioned by Pope Honorius in one of his letters dated to 627 (Onorio I, epist. IX, in PL 80: coll. 478–479). See R. Zucca, "I centri urbani bizantini nel territorio arborense," in Corrias and Cosentino, *Ai confini dell'impero*, 109–14, at 110.

177   J. Durliat, "Taxes sur l'entrée des marchandises dans la cité de *Carales*-Cagliari à l'époque byzantine (582–602)," *DOP* 36 (1982): 1–14.

178   Procopius, *Bell. Goth*, IV.24.31–38; Dewing, *Prokopios* (n. 129, above), 518; *S. Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistolarum* 9:196, 752; Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina*, 22–23. L. Pani Ermini and P. G. Spanu, "Aspetti di archeologia urbana: Ricerche nel suburbio orientale di Cagliari," in *La "Civitas christiana": Urbanistica delle città italiane tra tarda antichità e alto medioevo: Aspetti di archeologia urbana*, ed. P. Demeglio and C. Lambert (Turin, 1992), 83–118, at 15–16.

179   R. Martorelli, "L'assetto del 'quartiere' portuale nella Cagliari bizantina: Dai dati antichi e attuali alcune ipotesi ricostruttive," in *Know the Sea to Live the Sea*, 83–198, at 88.

180   M. A. Mongiu, "Cagliari e la sua conurbazione tra tardoantico e altomedioevo," in *Il suburbio delle città in Sardegna: Persistenze e trasformazioni; Atti del III Convegno sull'archeologia tardoromana e altomedioevale in Sardegna* (Taranto, 1989), 89–124. See also L. Pani Ermini, "La Sardegna nel periodo vandalico," in *Storia dei Sardi e della Sardegna: Dalle origini alla fine dell'età bizantina*, ed. M. Guidetti (Milan, 1987), 297–327, at 308–9; Pani Ermini and Spanu, "Aspetti di archeologia urbana," 12.

169   Rowland, *Periphery* (n. 33, above), 126–30.

170   M. Milanese, "Contribution of Archaeology to Medieval and Modern Sardinia," in Hobart, *A Companion to Sardinian History*, 269–313, at 271.

171   Galoppini, "Overview," 87.

172   L. T. Darling, "The Mediterranean as a Borderland," *Review of Middle East Studies* 46.1 (Summer 2012): 54–63, at 58–59.

173   R. Martorelli, "Status quaestionis e linee di ricerca sull'età bizantina in Sardegna: La cultura materiale," *Forme e caratteri della presenza bizantina nel Mediterraneo occidentale*, 73–94, at 76–77.

174   D. Corda, "Ceramiche dipinte alto-medioevali in Sardegna: Attestazioni e problemi cronologici," in *Settecento–Millecento*, 705–28, at 708; also Martorelli, "Status quaestionis," 78–79.

175   Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina* (n. 31, above), 20.

century, if not later) entailed the continuous maintenance of the main processional road.[181] Although it remained outside the main walled area that protected the harbor, which may have hosted a detachment of the Byzantine fleet, this area has revealed a large number of eighth-to-ninth-century globular amphorae.[182] Forum and painted wares also attest the economic vitality of at least some areas of the city.[183] Notwithstanding the little urban archaeology available, Cagliari reminds us of Ephesus, which was also divided into two coherent foci: an important although fortified pilgrimage center was built around the sixth-century church of Saint John, located on a hill well outside the former late antique polis.[184] It shrank and morphed into a still impressive walled area with multiple foci of settlements crowding the harbor.[185] Cagliari's multifunctional religious, military, and economic roles and the importance of its harbor for the Constantinopolitan elites may have translated into an urban landscape characterized by multiple foci of settlements. Although some parts of the city were deserted, others remained active as the administrative and episcopal urban cores moved to the west of the classical city.[186]

It is also important to note that the late antique Sardinian dichotomy between the military center of Forum Traiani (administered by the dux) and the coastal site of Cagliari (where the praeses sat) was resolved in favor of the latter, even though it was repeatedly battered by Arab naval raids, beginning in the mid-seventh century.[187] Indeed, Forum Traiani-Chrysopolis seems to have lost its importance in the late seventh or the beginning of the eighth century.[188] Between the seventh and tenth centuries, Cagliari was the seat of the Sardinian archbishop as well as the administrative, military, and political center of the island.[189] This is also confirmed by literary sources like the *Revised Royal Frankish Annals*, which mention the arrival at the Carolingian court of *legati Sardorum de Carali civitate dona ferentes* ("emissaries of the Sardinians from Cagliari who brought gifts"), requesting help against Andalusian pirates.[190] Thus, as in the case of Sicily, Cagliari's resilience points to a different model of insular urban settlement (in a way that also reminds us of other insular spaces like Cyprus); it was not the result of a hasty retreat to the hills in the face of a threatening Muslim advance.[191]

Of course, not all coastal Sardinian cities survived. Examples include Nora, whose social structures and urban fabric dissolved in the late seventh to early eighth century, although the local sanctuary of Saint Ephesios was frequented until the ninth century,[192] or Tharros, whose harbor nevertheless yielded four Islamic seals dated to the mid-eighth century, possible proof of an

181   Also, part of the classical urban grid seemed to have been kept in good condition; see R. Martorelli and D. Mureddu, *Archeologia urbana a Cagliari: Scavi in vico III Lanusei (1996–1997)* (Cagliari, 2006), 12–69.

182   M. Perra, "Anfore dall'Oriente e dalle regioni tirreniche," in *Know the Sea to Live the Sea*, 649–59, at 654; Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina*, 31–32; Pani Ermini, "La Sardegna," 311–16; D. Salvi, "Ad ovest di Tuvixeddu: La necropoli di Santa Gilla," *Quaderni della Soprintendenza per i bene archeologica per le province di Cagliari e Oristano* 23 (2007–12): 134–54, at 141–42; Rowland, *Periphery*, 130.

183   F. Zedda, "Ceramiche sovradipinte e invetriate," in *Know the Sea to Live the Sea*, 668–78; Martorelli, "Cagliari" (n. 31, above), 332; idem, "Archeologia urbana a Cagliari" (n. 21, above); idem, "L'assetto," 88.

184   For an overview of the recent archaeological excavations in Ephesos, see F. Daim and S. Ladstätter, *Ephesos in byzantinischer Zeit* (Mainz, 2011), and S. Ladstätter, "Ephesos from Late Antiquity until the Middle Ages: An Archaeological Introduction," in *Ephesos from Late Antiquity until the Late Middle Ages: Proceedings of the International Conference at the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, Koç University, Istanbul 30th November–2nd December 2012*, ed. Ladstätter and C. Mango (Vienna, 2019), 11–72.

185   C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine, and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 2010).

186   Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina*, 28.

187   Cosentino, "Byzantine Sardinia" (n. 31, above), 351–54; P. Fois, "Omayyadi e Bizantini in Sardegna: Concezioni e realtà di una lunga guerra (706–752/3)," in *Entre Oriente y Occidente: Textos y espacios medievales*, ed. M. M. Aldón and M. Massaiu (Cordoba, 2016), 51–72; Zucca, "I centri urbani bizantini," 111–14.

188   A. Vacca, "Forum Traiani: Polis Teicheris," in *Città, territorio, produzione e commercio nella Sardegna medievale: Studi in onore di L. Pani Ermini*, ed. R. Martorelli (Cagliari, 2002), 187–205.

189   R. Turtas, "La Chiesa sarda tra il VI e l'XI secolo," in Corrias and Cosentino, *Ai confini dell'impero* (n. 31, above), 29–38, at 33–38.

190   *Annales Einhardi*, ed. G. Pertz, MGH SS 1 (Hanover, 1826), 202: 815 A.D. l. Note that the so-called *Annales Einhardi* are no longer considered to be by Einhard; they are indeed a revision of the *Royal Frankish Annals* by an unknown author: see R. Collins, "The 'Reviser' Revisited: Another Look at the Alternative Version of the *Annales Regni Francorum*," in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History; Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. A. Callander Murray (Toronto, 1998), 191–213.

191   See n. 23, above.

192   J. Bonetto and A. R. Ghiotto, "Nora nei secoli dell'alto medioevo," in *Settecento–Millecento*, 271–300; Martorelli, "Città in Sardegna," 273; Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina*, 114 with detailed reference to the primary sources mentioning the city.

Arab incursion.[193] However, we should also mention Aristhianis on the southwestern coast of Sardinia. This city is first recorded by the seventh-century Byzantine geographer George of Cyprus, although sigillographic evidence documents a church dedicated to the Virgin, which was restored in the ninth century, and some sixth-century Byzantine officials.[194] Indeed, one of the most significant sources for the history of Sardinia in the transitional period is a cache of more than ninety Byzantine lead seals in Latin and Greek discovered in San Giovanni di Sinis. Dating between the sixth and eighth centuries, the seals point to the continuous correspondence between Constantinople and the local authorities.[195] The latter included officials such as the *meizoterioi*, military officers, and religious as well as governmental authorities like the dux.[196] Evidence of the continuous military importance of the duke is represented by the mid-eighth-century inscription from Turris Libisonis, on the western coast of the island, "celebrating a great victory by the consul and duke Constantinos over the Lombards and other barbarians who had attacked by land and sea."[197]

It is unclear why and when the Sardinian ducal title fell out of use. It was replaced by that of archon as the sole Byzantine authority on the island, based in

Cagliari, and was still mentioned by Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos's *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* in the mid-tenth century and confirmed by hagiographic sources.[198] It is, however, important to stress that the resort to archontes was not a signal of a distant and uninterested Constantinopolitan power.[199] As Cosentino remarks: "even in the ninth century, Sardinia was still perceived by the Muslims as a province of the Byzantine empire as Ibn Khurdādhbeh between 840 and 845 listed the *batriq* (patrikios) of Sardinia among the Byzantine provincial governors."[200] In this light, it is also interesting to note that Ibn al-Athīr considers Sardinia not to have fallen to Islam until the attack from the Taifa of Denia in 1015.[201]

In Sardinia, the political transition to an archontate coincided with a strong presence of Greek monastic traditions and local church-building activities sponsored by local aristocratic families, which were booming in the late ninth to early tenth century but beginning to appear even earlier.[202] In other words, local elites looked to Constantinople as a source of political legitimacy and status, while at the same time performing

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193   Fois, "Il ruolo della Sardegna," 17; Rowland, *Periphery*, 136; P. Spanu, "Iterum est insula quae dicitur Sardinia, in qua plurimas fuisse civitates legimus (Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia V, 26): Note sulle città sarde tra la tarda antichità e l'alto medioevo," in *Le città italiane tra la tarda antichità e l'alto medioevo: Atti del Convegno (Ravenna, 26–28 febbraio 2004)*, ed. A. Augenti (Florence, 2006), 589–612, at 594–97.

194   *Georgii Cyprii Descriptio Orbis Romani*, ed. H. Geltzer (Berlin, 1890), 35; Spanu, *La Sardegna bizantina*, 64–65; B. Panico and P. G. Spanu, "Archeologia globale dei paesaggi fluviali e costieri della Sardegna: La foce del Tirso e le aree umide del golfo di Oristano tra antichità e medioevo," in *Storia e archeologia globale dei paesaggi rurali in Italia tra Tardoantico e Medioevo*, ed. G. Volpe (Bari, 2018), 623–48, at 638–39; Zucca, "I centri urbani bizantini."

195   See n. 162, above.

196   Spanu and Zucca, "Nuovi documenti epigrafici," 149–58. Although the editors of the seal refer to them as fiscal officials, the meizoteroi were primarily estate managers, although often tapping in the imperial workshops; in fact, one must differentiate between meizoteroi and *meizoteroi ton ergodosion* as mentioned in the *Kletorologion*. For this distinction, see N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Le monde Byzantin 4 (Paris, 1972), 317 with further bibliography. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing the difference to my attention.

197   See n. 59, above.

198   *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies*, ed. A. Moffatt (Canberra, 2012), 2:48, 690. On the archon of Sardinia, see the detailed account in L. Gallinari, "The *Iudex Sardiniae* and the *Archon Sardanias*," in *The Making of Medieval Sardinia*, ed. A. Metcalfe, H. Fernández-Aceves, and M. Muresu (Leiden, 2021), 210–13. See also S. Cosentino, "Re-Analyzing Some Byzantine Bullae from Sardinia," in *Siegel und Siegler: Akten des 8. Internationalen Symposions für Byzantinische Sigillographie*, ed. C. Ludwig et al. (Frankfurt, 2002), 74–78; Cosentino, "Potere e istituzioni" (n. 59, above), 10; Spanu, "Dalla Sardegna bizantina" (n. 32, above), 372.

199   Cosentino, "A Longer Antiquity?," (n. 40, above), 99.

200   Cosentino, "Byzantine Sardinia," 353; Ibn Khurdādhbeh, *Kitāb al-Masālik wāal Mamālik [Le livre des routes et des provinces]*, ed. Ch. A. C. Barbier de Meynard (Paris, 1865). A caveat should be given here because Ibn Khurdādhbeh relied on a list he found in al-Djarmi that mirrored a late seventh-century situation, hence the problematic aspect in using it to document the situation at the time of Ibn Khurdādhbeh. However, Cosentino's assertion has been recently confirmed by Gallinari (Gallinari, "*Iudex Sardiniae*," 202–3, 213).

201   Possibly even later, for the Taifa of Denia was defeated one year later. Ibn el-Athir, *Annales du Maghreb* (n. 151, above), 51–52. I am indebted to Dr. Jonathan Jarrett for bringing the passage to my attention.

202   Rowland, *Periphery*, 146; Muresu, *La moneta* (n. 31, above), 456–57; Cosentino, "Re-Analyzing," 73–75; Cosentino, "Byzantine Sardinia," 358–59. See also R. Cotroneo and R. Martorelli, "Chiese e culti di matrice bizantina in Sardegna," in Zanini, Pergola, and Michaelidis, *Insular System of Byzantine Mediterranean* (n. 8, above), 97–114.

creative acts of political expediency, betraying their capacity to bend to the military and political pressure of the moment.[203]

This is shown, for instance, by a treaty the local authorities signed with the Arabs in 752/3 or by the delegation from Cagliari who visited the Frankish kingdom in 815,[204] or again by the continuous correspondence (also demonstrated by sigillographic evidence) between the pope and the Sardinian ruling authorities, and by consistent trading relationships documented mainly by ceramic evidence, mainly Forum Wares.[205]

It is not by chance that Arab sources recognize that Sardinia remained under Byzantine rule. Indeed, a Byzantine naval squadron used Sardinia as an operational base. This is shown, for instance, by a considerable force of three hundred *dromones* that wrested Pantelleria and Lampedusa back from the Arabs in 760, or the expedition against Mauri pirates in 813. One lead seal, although dated to the seventh to eighth century, belonging to a *droungarios*, is also included in the cache from Sinis.[206] All in all, we can reassess the catastrophic turn of events, like the passage from the Syriac chronicle written at the end of the seventh century and falsely attributed to Saint Methodios of Olympus:[207]

The sons of Ismael gained dominion in all the islands; then they will build ships for themselves in the manner of birds and will fly over the waves of the sea. Then they will go up to lands of the west as far as Rome the great . . . and Sardinia the great, which is beyond Rome.[208]

Unfortunately for pseudo-Methodios, the sigillographic and numismatic evidence, as well as archaeology, when paired with different if sparse literary sources, presents a completely different picture, one that speaks of continuous Constantinopolitan involvement in Tyrrhenian political, military, and economic affairs and the resilient urban insular hubs as seen in Sardinia or Sicily.

Sardinia and Sicily played important roles across local and long-distance commercial networks, linking the western Mediterranean with the Balkans and northern Europe, and were the foci of Byzantine political, cultural, and economic power. Finally, this should help tip the historiographic balance in favor of the idea that the islands and the Tyrrhenian system of exchange remained active by capturing contested strategic outposts and spaces boasting high levels of economic resilience (at elite and subelite levels), enhanced by the continuing vitality of the urban fabric and landscape.[209] This was obviously not exclusive to islands, as much research on Tyrrhenian gateway communities and enclaves like Amalfi and Naples shows.[210] Nevertheless, it should encourage us to look at insular spaces as

203   Rowland, *Periphery*, 150; Cosentino, "Re-Analyzing," 78; A. Guillou, "La diffusione della cultura bizantina," 373–423, at 402–5, and "La lunga età bizantina: Politica ed economia," 329–71, at 370–71, in Guidetti, *Storia dei Sardi e della Sardegna*.

204   ʿAlī Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh*, 4.1, quoted and translated in Stasolla, "La Sardegna" (n. 61, above), 87–88.

205   Cosentino, "Byzantine Sardinia," 348–51.

206   On the seals, see Spanu and Zucca, *I sigilli* (n. 162, above), 115; Cosentino ("Byzantine Sardinia," 364), however, claims that military units under the command of *droungarioi* were quartered on the island in the eighth and ninth centuries. On the 760 expedition, see *Codex Carolinus*, ed. W. Gundlach, in *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini aevi (I)*, ed. E. Dümmler, W. Gundlach, W. Arndt, and C. Rodenberg [MGH ep. in quarto 3] (Berlin, 1892), 459–657, esp. 514–15. On the 813 raid, see *Annales Regni Francorum*, 137–39; also McCormick, *Origins* (n. 61, above), 900. On the presence and interventions of the Byzantine fleet in the Tyrrhenian, see also Picard, *La mer des califes* (n. 65, above), 298–302; Jeffreys and Prior, *Age of the Δρομων*, 41. It is also possible that Sardinia was the base from which La Garde-Freinet's harbor was destroyed in 941 by Romanus I and Hugh of Arles (Jarrett, "Nests of Pirates?" [n. 61, above], 213).

207   On the methodological problems presented by the numerous apocalyptic texts written in the aftermath of the Arab invasions in the eastern and western Mediterranean, see S. Griffiths, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christian and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, 2008), 23–44; also L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium*

in the Iconoclastic Era (ca. 680–850): The Sources (Aldershot, 2001), 270–76, and K. Sessa, "The New Environmental Fall of Rome: A Methodological Consideration," *JLA* 12.1 (2019): 211–55, at 243–44 with further bibliography.

208   B. Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, DOML 14 (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 15. See also W. Kaegi, "Byzantine Sardinia and Africa Face the Muslims: Seventh-Century Evidence," *Bizantinistica*, ser. 2.3 (2001): 1–25, at 5.

209   Cosentino, "A Longer Antiquity?," 93–98. See also Vroom, "Byzantine Web," 293; Decker, *Byzantine Dark Ages* (n. 10, above), 177–78; C. Negrelli, "Towards a Definition of Early Medieval Pottery: Amphorae and Other Vessels in the Northern Adriatic between the 7th and the 8th Centuries," in Gelichi and Hodges, *Da un mare all'altro*, 207–34; Arcifa, "Nuove ipotesi" (n. 100, above), 1–47.

210   P. Arthur, "Naples: A Case of Urban Survival in the Early Middle Ages?," *MÉFRM* 103.2 (1991): 759–84; G. Gargano, *La città davanti al Mare: Aree urbane e storie sommerse di Amalfi nel Medioevo* (Amalfi, 1992), 31–125. See also Zanini, *Le italie bizantine* (n. 35, above), 306–11, 316–19. Also n. 26, above.

territories empowered by their own agency and influence. In other words, not only could the geostrategic role of Sicily and (although to a lesser extent) Sardinia vary according to the ebbs and flows of imperial-caliphal (and Frankish) political and military relations, but they could often morph into "central" places in their own right, which like kaleidoscopes, deconstructed and recomposed the light of Constantinopolitan influence in a variety of images projected along Mediterranean sea-lanes.[211]

The "Not-So Invisible" Cities of the Western Byzantine Mediterranean Islands

As Abulafia asserts, "the fate of islands cannot be understood without taking into account the wider picture of economic, social and political developments around the shores of the Mediterranean."[212] This is notwithstanding their diversity of size or their strategic positions along the shipping routes,[213] but it allows a reassessment of a long-established historiographical narrative labeling islands simply as a "maritime" continuation of the terrestrial Arab–Byzantine frontier, absent of any urban life.[214] This is also relevant in the case of the western Mediterranean, where Sardinia (on a par with the Balearics) has been regarded by some historians as lost forever to Byzantium from the mid-eighth century on. In fact, the enduring gravitational pull of Sicily at the heart of the Tyrrhenian regional exchange system could explain why Sardinia also remained in the imperial interest. Constantinople did not turn its back on the western Mediterranean, but the "Byzantineness" of Sardinia was different from that of Sicily, where the political and administrative link with Constantinople

was strong enough to be regarded as a direct emanation of the Christian-Roman imperial identity radiating from the capital.[215] In Sardinia, local elites looked to Byzantium's power through the concessions of titles or dignities, which de facto legitimized their socioeconomic and political status and influence over the local community.

The simple core versus periphery frontier model is called into question here, for the insular elites seemed capable in this period of modulating their political agenda according to the pressures exerted by other military and political actors (Carolingians, Lombards, and of course the Umayyads and later the Aghlabids), and by the ebbs and flows of Byzantine naval power.[216] What emerges is a picture of an imperial maritime frontier, less a distant boundary than a constellation of spaces.[217] The political fluidity and sociocultural expediency witnessed on these islands, in turn, nurtured and tapped into the economic vitality of such insular areas. In the course of this paper, the reader has been confronted with an economically resilient "fire under the ashes," characterizing an empire that refused to die.[218] This fire can be best documented, mainly in archaeological terms, in the historical trajectories of its larger islands like Sicily and Sardinia. Located along local and interregional shipping routes, they acted as an interface between regional economic spaces. Just as western Sicily inclined toward the south Ionian and the Aegean, the eastern part of the island was paired with Sardinia, for

211 Darling, "Mediterranean" (n. 172, above), 54–63.

212 Abulafia, "Islands in Context" (n. 66, above), 288.

213 Picard and Balard, *La Méditerranée au Moyen Âge* (n. 34, above), 136; Horden and Purcell, *Corrupting Sea* (n. 13, above), 76; Gordon and Kouremenos, "Introduction" (n. 21, above), 3.

214 Lounghis, *Byzantium in the Eastern Mediterranean* (n. 63, above), 188–90. See also I. Randall, "Conceptualizing the Islamic–Byzantine Maritime Frontier," in *The Archaeology of Medieval Islamic Frontiers: From the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea*, ed. A. Eger (Louisville, 2019), 80–102. On the Arab–Byzantine frontier, see H. Kennedy and J. Haldon, "The Arab–Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands," *ZRVI* 19 (1980): 79–116; A. Eger, *The Islamic–Byzantine Frontier: Interaction and Exchange among Muslim and Christian Communities* (London, 2015), with further bibliography.

215 On the concept of a "Christian-Roman" Empire, see Haldon, *Empire That Would Not Die* (n. 11, above), 107–58, and A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), with further bibliography. See also W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford, 1991); M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996).

216 On the ineffectuality of the core vs. periphery model, see A. Eger, "The Archaeology of Medieval Islamic Frontiers: An Introduction," in *Archaeology of Medieval Islamic Frontiers*, 5–9; see also Randall, "Conceptualizing," 80–86, and J. Herrin, *Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire* (Princeton, 2013).

217 D. Harrison, "Boundaries and Places of Power: Notions of Liminality and Centrality in the Early Middle Ages," in *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to Carolingians*, ed. W. Pohl, I. Wood, and H. Reimitz (Leiden, 2001), 83–93, at 85.

218 The quotation refers to the paper delivered by Cécile Morrison at the conference "The 8th Century: Patterns of Transition in Economy and Trade throughout the Late Antique, Early Medieval, and Islamicate Mediterranean," Berlin, 4–7 October 2017. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Morrison for allowing me access to a refined version of her paper.

both leaned toward the Tyrrhenian system of exchange, with Rome and Naples having a strong gravitational pull. Sardinia was also crucial, nevertheless, for maintaining a link with the most distant of the large islands of the Byzantine Mediterranean—the Balearics—just as Sicily did with Malta.[219]

Here, local cities benefited from the particular political, military, and sociocultural connotations of insular frontier spaces by retaining coherence of urban fabric, vitality of urban sociopolitical life, resilient commercial and artisanal activities, and importance as religious-pilgrimage hubs. These were predicated along different urbanistic and structural lines, with polyfocal residential foci within and outside walled spaces. Of course, not all insular cities and their trajectories can be explained by the "city of islands" model. Some classical cities disappeared almost entirely in the transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages, while others became fortified refuges (in the Balkans) or villages, as Niewöhner has cogently shown for some Anatolian centers like Aizanoi or Miletus.[220] Nonetheless, the "city of islands" model can explain the changes and development of a number of urban cases far better than any of the existing historiographical interpretations.

In fact, it is interesting to note how even new eighth-century coastal urban settlements (which Hodges labeled urban-like *emporia*), like Comacchio in the north Adriatic crescent and Amalfi in the Tyrrhenian Sea, seem to have developed a highly functional "insular-like" settlement pattern, albeit small,

mainly owing to their specific geography and location.[221] They also showed the central role played by urban archaeology (although less prominent in Amalfi) and a refined analysis of material culture. Indeed, Sicily seems to be the best example of the last assertion, for better-published archaeology has recently led to its incorporation into the Aegean side of the so-called Byzantine heartland as proposed by scholars like Haldon, Laiou, and Morrisson.[222]

In this sense, by fully embracing the "city of islands" model, one can try to subvert the traditional historiographical narrative, which has often regarded islands like Sicily and Sardinia as the "face of the non-cities": fully rural peripheral spaces where urban life was limited to a few fortified hilltop outposts designed to protect Syracuse, the capital of the local theme.[223] This has turned them into a microcosm of the decline of classical urbanism once the empire lost both its western provinces in the fifth century, the ephemeral Justinianic *Reconquista* notwithstanding, and Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in the second half of the seventh century. I have tried to show that urban life remained economically resilient and viable on the western islands of the Byzantine Mediterranean. Beyond their capitals—Syracuse and Cagliari—in the transition from late antiquity to the

219   Zavagno, "Islands in the Stream" (n. 3, above), 151. See also B. Brunella and N. Cutajar, "Amphorae and Economic Activity in Malta," in Zanini, Pergola, and Michaelidis, *Insular System of Byzantine Mediterranean*, 15–30.

220   For the Balkans, see mainly C. Bouras, "Byzantine Cities in Greece," in *Heaven on Earth: Cities and Countryside in Byzantine Greece*, ed. J. Albani and E. Chalkia (Athens, 2013), 44–73; Dunn, "Transition" (n. 3, above); Veikou, "Byzantine Histories" (n. 3, above). See also A. Augenti and N. Christie, *Urbes extinctae: Archaeologies of Abandoned Classical Towns* (Aldershot, 2012); P. Niewöhner, "The End of the Byzantine City in Anatolia: The Case of Miletus," in *Städte im lateinischen Westen und im griechischen Osten zwischen Spätantike und Früher Neuzeit Topographie–Recht–Religion*, ed. E. Gruber, M. Popović, M. Scheutz, and H. Weigl (Vienna, 2016), 63–77; P. Niewöhner, "Aizanoi and Anatolia: Town and Countryside in Late Late Antiquity," in *Millennium: Jahrbuch zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.* 3 (Berlin, 2006): 239–53.

221   Comacchio was located at the intersection of fluvial, lagoon (the Po River delta), and maritime routes linking the Po valley with the Adriatic (and the Mediterranean); Amalfi developed as a "fragmented" commercial urban community scattered around a small alluvial plain on the southern coast of the Sorrentine peninsula. See S. Gelichi et al., "History of a Forgotten Town: Comacchio and Its Archaeology," in Gelichi and Hodges, *Da un mare all'altro*, 169–206; S. Gelichi et al., "Castrum igne combussit: Comacchio fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo," *Archeologia Medievale* 33 (2006): 19–48. On the comparison with northern European emporia, see Hodges, "Adriatic Sea Trade" (n. 83, above), 207–34; and S. Gelichi et al., "Flourishing Places in North-Eastern Italy: Towns and Emporia between Late Antiquity and the Carolingian Age," in *Post-Roman Towns: Trade and Settlement in Europe and Byzantium*, vol. 1, *The Heirs of the Roman West* (Berlin, 2007), 79–102, at 88–93. On Amalfi as a "fragmented" but coherent urban community, see Abulafia, "Islands in Context," 294; and M. Harpster et al., "The First Three Seasons of Research (2016–2018): Modeling the Maritime Landscape of the Costiera Amalfitana," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 50 (2021): 63–75.

222   Laiou and Morrisson, *Byzantine Economy* (n. 87, above), 86; Haldon, *Empire That Would not Die* (n. 11, above), 33–56.

223   L. Cracco Ruggini, "La Sicilia fra Roma e Bisanzio," in *Storia della Sicilia*, vol. 3, ed. R. Romeo (Naples, 1980), 1–96. For the most recent reassessment of urban archaeology in Sicily, see Arcifa, "Trasformazioni urbane" (n. 48, above), 31–40.

early Middle Ages, sites like Catania, Palermo, Olbia, and Aristhianis remained active and clearly survived repeated Muslim raids on the insular coastline from the late seventh century onward.

This is not to deny that fortifications were integral to the development of insular urban centers, but such defenses did not equate to an abrupt abandonment of the coasts, and they were not simply the results of state-directed, centrally planned initiatives. Urban resilience also stemmed from the persistence of levels of demand and regular if not frequent regional and subregional contacts, and, eventually, the unique political and administrative structures molded by the political or military difficulties of the hour. Indeed, in the Byzantine Mediterranean chessboard, some urban "pieces" could be lost, either taken by "the enemy" or falling prey to the reorganization of the shipping routes and exchange system along more fragmented and localized lines. Cities like Agrigento and Nora remind us that urban sites could die or become irrelevant in the ebbs and flows of Mediterranean political and economic history. However, one should note that other pieces rise to military and political importance in the new regional strategies set forth by the imperial administration, the military machinery, and local elites. Indeed, the new model of urbanism like the one we documented in Castronovo and Enna (as paired with similar examples on Crete and Naxos) is a good reminder that no single model can fully encase the regional and even subregional urban developments. Nevertheless, we are also reminded that we are not simply looking at the city of islands as a chess player whose castle (with the king barricaded inside) is surrounded and being pounded by a full array of enemy pieces.

Here the aforementioned chess metaphors are deliberate and in tune with a coda to this paper. It allows me to agree with scholars like Tsivikis and Curta, who have used Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* as "a symbol for transition or a metaphor for disappearance: of [cities]."[224] In Calvino's novel, Kubilai Khan, seated at a chessboard, overcomes the difficulty of communicating in the language of his guest—the famous Venetian traveler Marco Polo—by inviting him to describe, with the help only of the chessmen, the cities he has visited; the powerful Mongol ruler concludes that "if each city is like a game of chess, the day when I have learned the rules, I shall finally possess my empire, even if I shall never succeed in knowing all the cities it contains."[225] However, unraveling the fate of Byzantine urbanism by using Calvino's imaginary cities is an exercise which Tsivikis has proved to be futile, leading Byzantinists to sacrifice the "real and archaeologically-rooted Byzantine city" in order to chase illusory imitations of "'the City' (i.e., Constantinople)." [226] Therefore, I will limit myself to a more casual and final observation. In the construction of Calvino's multiple urban semantics and utopias, only one city is located on an island.

> Andria was built so artfully that its every street follows a planet's orbit, and the buildings and the places of community life repeat the order of the constellations and the position of the most luminous stars. . . . Convinced that every innovation in the city influences the sky's pattern, before taking any decision [Andrians] calculate the risks and advantages for themselves and for the city and for all worlds.[227]

We should not try to look for Andria in any of the aforementioned insular cities. However, by reflecting upon Andria's stellar urban body, we may realize that islands and their cities rest on caution; islanders need to be careful of what their acts bring about, lest they be abandoned by the stars and engulfed by the sea.[228] In the end, it is this ability to link the fate written in the stars with human fortunes that makes islands unique.

Department of History
Administrative and Social Sciences
Bilkent University
06800 Ankara
Turkey
luca.zavagno@bilkent.edu.tr

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224   I. Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (Orlando, 2010). See Curta, "Postcards from Maurilia" (n. 9, above), and N. Tsivikis, "Πού πάνε οι πόλεις όταν εξαφανίζονται; Ο οικισμός της πρώιμης και μέσης Βυζαντινής Μεσσήνης," in *Οι Βυζαντινές Πόλεις* (n. 3, above), 47–71. I must admit I lost myself in Calvino's utopias: see Zavagno, *Cities in Transition* (n. 72, above), 3–7.

225   Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 21.

226   Tsivikis, "Moving beyond the Invisible Cities of Byzantium" (n. 9 above), 333.

227   Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 150–51.

228   D. Lowenthal, "Islands, Lovers, and Others," *Geographical Review* 97 (2007): 202–29, at 218.